

Shoutarou Mizuki

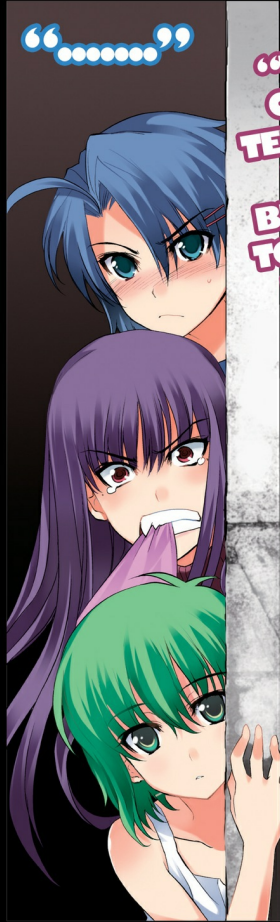
Demon King
DAIMAŌ
ACT6

VISIT...

LANZAROTE
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Demon King
DAIMAO
ACT 6



“.....”

“THIS
OPEN
TERRACE
NOW
BELONGS
TO BLACK
DEMON
KING!”

“SHUT
THEM
DOWN?”

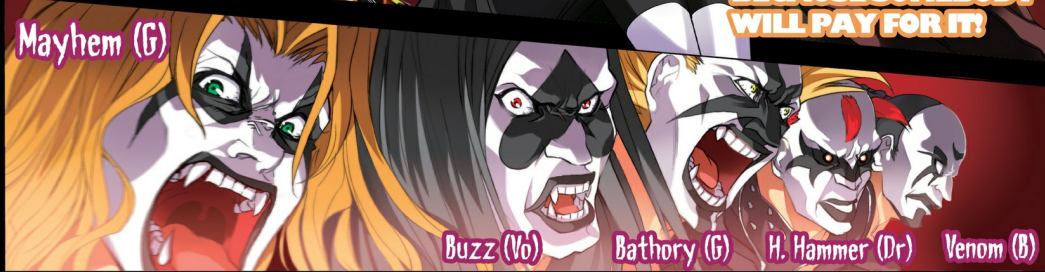
FALL
IN
LOVE
WITH
ME.

SO THAT'S
THE DEMON
KING'S TRUE
POWER...



MONEY! MONEY! MONEY!
MONEY'S ALL THAT MATTERS!

BECAUSE SOMEBODY
WILL PAY FOR IT!



Mayhem (G)

Buzz (Vo)

Bathory (G)

H. Hammer (Dr)

Venom (B)

13 Fri



Junko

"OHH, B-BROTHER..."





Character Introduction

KEINA DORONZ

.....
A girl that appeared out of nowhere, who looks just like Keena. She says she has the hairpiece that Akuto gave her at the orphanage when they were little.

KORONE

.....
An artificial human tasked with guarding and observing Akuto. Uses secret tools that she conceals in her bag. Loves to tease Akuto.

KEENA SOGA

.....
A ditzy girl who's taken a liking to Akuto. Loves rice. Can't do magic, but is very good at flying and turning herself invisible.

AKUTO SAI

.....
Our "good-hearted" protagonist who has been told (again?) that he's going to become the Demon King. The Demon King's war is over, but his troubles continue.

JUNKO HATTORI

.....
A pure-hearted class rep who's in love with Akuto. An Iga Ninja who doesn't like frogs.

A black and white manga-style illustration of a young woman with long, dark hair and bangs. She is wearing a dark, low-cut top with a white collar. She has a slight, enigmatic smile and is looking directly at the viewer.

FUJIKO ETO

.....
A black mage and chemist who's sworn loyalty to Akuto. On the surface, she's one of the most beloved girls in the school, but she actually loves evil conspiracies.

A black and white manga-style illustration of a young woman with short, light-colored hair. She is wearing a dark, hooded cloak. She has a slight smile and is looking towards the viewer. In the foreground, there are glowing, circular magical symbols and patterns.

LILY SHIRAISHI

.....
Student Council President of Constant Magical Academy. Wears a trademark hat, and snaps whenever someone calls her "small."

A black and white manga-style illustration of a young man with short, light-colored hair. He is wearing a light-colored shirt and a dark tie. He has a slightly mischievous or determined expression and is looking towards the viewer.

HIROSHI MIWA

.....
A troublemaker who calls Akuto "boss." He misunderstands everything Akuto does, and only serves to make him more infamous.

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Prologue

It was pure coincidence.

That's why nobody cared about it.

Whether a child is born naturally or artificially, there's always someone there to watch them. In most cases they are welcomed, and in a few rare exceptions they are hated. But either way, in the instant they're born, they're the center of attention.

This girl, however, was an exception.

"Our tests show that she's human. But we have no prior data logs," the Liradan secretary said.

In the corner of a huge office that covered an entire floor of a high-rise building, Shoji Shiraishi, a priest of Megis, was frowning and tapping his fingers against his desk in frustration.

He had a strangely sharp gaze that suggested he'd been a wild one in his youth. And he was the father of Lily Shiraishi, the student council president at Constant Magical Academy. As his daughter's personality might suggest, he still hadn't settled down, even in middle age. The other priests called him nicknames such as "loose cannon" and "powder keg."

His god, Megis, was the god of culture, arts, and education, and was generally considered to be the opposite of Shoji himself: calm and peaceful. The god's temple wasn't in this high-rise; it was inside a dignified building of culture, surrounded by works of art. Shoji's job was to work behind the scenes, but that made his rank among the priests quite high. He was a high-ranking bureaucrat in the field of education.

"Why does our sect have to deal with this?" Shoji asked. He knew the reason, though, and the secretary replied just how he'd expected.

"Anyone without a citizen's registration is an illegal immigrant, or should be, but for some reason, she's been baptized by Megis."

“But there’s no record of her in the data logs.”

In the Empire, humans were baptized as soon as they were born. From then on, the gods recorded data on every action they took. If they behaved properly, they would be granted the blessings of magic as a reward. That was the social welfare service the imperial government provided to its citizens.

Of course, citizen’s registrations were a separate matter. The foreigner’s registry was operated on a different system than the gods. Some people refused baptisms, and of course, foreigners weren’t baptized at all.

Shoji had been told the girl was found standing alone in the crater left after the recent battle with the Demon King.

The knights who’d brought her in said that she could speak, and knew who she was, but she seemed to know barely anything at all about where she was.

“But we have her logs from when she was found there,” the secretary said flatly.

“Then are you saying she’s an angel, come down from the heavens?” Shoji’s tone was sarcastic, but the secretary nodded.

“Perhaps so.”

“Well, that’s nice. I feel saved. It was so nice of her to choose my sect.”

“Jokes aside, you need to decide what to do with her,” the secretary said coldly.

Shoji snorted.

“The solution is obvious. We have to treat her as a foreigner. You’ve already contacted Mofah’s people, haven’t you?”

“I’ve asked that she be registered. I requested they make her an exchange student from the Union.”

The god Mofah ruled over cross-cultural interactions and negotiations.

“I see. Then I can leave the rest in my daughter’s hands, I suppose.” Shoji leaned back in his chair.

“Your daughter’s the student council president, after all.”

Shoji seemed annoyed at her words, but he was grinning.

“Correct. She gets into all kinds of trouble. I heard that she actually got into a fight with the cabinet during that last little scuffle.”

“I’m glad to hear she’s doing well. But are you sure about this? It seems that for some reason, the black mages are after this girl. There were multiple attempts to access her data.”

“The rumor spread quickly, then. They probably suspect that someone altered her logs. It’s possible someone will go after her, but I’ll leave the investigation and observation to my daughter.” Shoji called up a mana screen on his desk, which showed the girl’s portrait and profile.

Keina Doronz. That was her name.

“It’s not that I don’t trust your daughter, but are you sure about this? Shouldn’t we take her into custody ourselves?” the secretary said. Shoji crossed his arms, making no attempt to hide his annoyance.

“The Academy’s the only clue we have, so its our only option. But why did she have memories of Constant Magical Academy, anyway?”

1 - Dating Disaster

“She’s been specially invited from overseas. Please be good to her...” The class teacher, Miss Mitsuko Torii, trailed off. She was a tall woman with curly hair and round glasses, who normally had an easygoing air about her. She only seemed upset now because of the problem child she already had in her class, and now there was a strange exchange student on top of that.

The problem child’s name was Akuto Sai. He was the student with the mean glare in the back row. He was handsome, but he was born with a mean-looking face, one that made people misunderstand him often. But that wasn’t the problem.

A prophecy (that was never wrong) had said that he was going to become the Demon King, and he’d already done so once. Of course, after the last time, there had been a long and complex series of events that had led to him losing that title, but his classmates didn’t care about that. They were in the same class with the boy who was going to destroy the world. There was a constant look of tension on their faces.

But Akuto himself was an introverted, hard-working young boy. He was very upset that his classmates feared him.

—A transfer student, huh? I hope she’s not too scared of me...

He meant it, too.

“Alright, Keina, come in.” A girl walked into the classroom. She was blonde with blue eyes, and had a cheerfully innocent smile.

Akuto couldn’t take his eyes off her. It wasn’t because of her looks — it was because of a bird-shaped hairpiece that was flashing in the lights from the classroom.

—Th-That’s the one I gave Keena before I left the orphanage...

Akuto stood up in shock, and the girl saw him. Her eyes went wide.

“Y-You’re...!” the girl gasped. She ran all the way from the front of the classroom to the back row, and then threw her arms around him.

“Do you remember the pu-ramise we made at the or-fan-ege? It’s me! Keina! I missed you so much!” she said in heavily accented Japanese.

—*Huh? There’s two Keenas?*

Akuto turned towards the red-haired Keena. She was sitting there, looking at both of them in surprise.

“Oh, I’m never letting you go again, my daa-rling!” Keina shouted.

○

At this point, we need to remember what happened to Akuto in the past.

Akuto grew up in an orphanage. When he left, he spent all his money buying a hairpiece for a girl that he’d only seen for an instant, and she and he both swore that they’d meet again.

The girl with the hairpiece was supposed to be Keena Soga, his classmate. If you wanted to be nice, you could say she was “easygoing.” If you didn’t, you could say she was an airhead. She always looked like she was on the verge of falling asleep. She loved rice, and she had only two spells she was any good at: flying, and turning invisible.

But now there were two hairpieces.

○

“H-How do you have the same hairpiece? And how do you remember the orphanage?”

Akuto looked at Keena and Keina in confusion. Both of them had the same bird-design hairpiece in their hair. The hairpiece had been expensive, but it was something he’d bought, not made. So it shouldn’t have been that surprising that there were two of them, but...

—*Why does she remember the orphanage? Then is she my...*

“Aaah!” Keena stood up and pointed at Keina. Akuto looked at her nervously.

—*Did Keena remember something? Or is there something wrong with what*

this girl just said...?

“You’ve got the same name as me!” Keena broke into a grin.

The rest of the class, who knew about Akuto and Keena’s past, slid off their chairs in shock. Akuto sighed to himself.

—That’s right. Keena kept saying she doesn’t remember meeting me in the orphanage...

“Hey darling, who’s that girl? She’s awfully pushy, isn’t she?” Keina said.

“Pushy? She’s your classmate, right? And if anybody’s being pushy here, it’s you, isn’t it? We’ve never met, have we?” Akuto said. Keina suddenly looked sad.

“Oh no! You don’t remember? That makes me so sad! That hay-er-peece you gave me at the or-fan-ege has been the only thing that’s kept me going my whole life!”

“At the orphanage? The way I remember it, the girl was red-haired.”

“Sometimes blonde hair looks red when you’re young! See? We both have the same memories! You’re my darling!” Keina rubbed her head up against Akuto’s chest.

“S-Stop that. Class is about to start...”

Akuto was interrupted by another voice.

“What are you doing? This is a classroom! Transfer student or not, now that you’re here, you’re a classmate. And you have to follow the rules!” It was the class rep, Junko Hattori, who yelled as she stood up. She was a beautiful girl with a reserved, prim and proper nature, but the harsh light in her eyes showed the stubbornness in her personality.

Keina glanced over at her. There was a frustration — no, an anger — in her eyes.

“Darling, she’s jealous of me because she loves you so much, right? Jealousy! That has to be it!”

“I’m not jealous! I’m just telling you to finish your introduction!” Junko yelled,

her face red.

“So it is jealousy.” Keina glanced at Junko out of the corner of her eye, and then wrapped her arms around Akuto’s neck, making sure Junko could see.

“I-I told you, it’s not...!” Junko’s face turned even brighter red.

Akuto gently removed her arms and spoke sternly.

“That’s right. Hattori isn’t jealous at all.”

“Th-That’s right. B-But... No... When you say it so firmly, it’s kind of like...” Junko fidgeted.

“Come on, get back to the front of the class and introduce yourself,” Akuto said. Keina nodded. She ran back up to the front and spread out both hands cheerfully.

“Hello, people of the Empire! I’m Keina Doronz, and I’m from the Union! I was told that the Empire was a bunch of grumpy jerks who loved to fight, but it looks like you’re not all bad people, so I think we can be friends!”

Keina gave the class the strangest introduction they’d ever heard.



“So do you know her, then?” Hiroshi Miwa asked. He was one of Akuto’s few friends, a small, mischievous boy who called Akuto ‘Boss.’

“Maybe...? I’m not sure, honestly.” Akuto said as they sat next to each other in the cafeteria eating lunch.

“What do you mean you’re not sure?”

“Honestly, even if she is the girl from back then, we only talked for a moment. At this point, we barely know each other. So I can’t really tell if she’s telling the truth...”

“That makes sense, yeah.”

“Yeah. And there’s something strange about her.”

“Something strange?”

“I don’t know how to say it. It’s like she’s just a little off.”

Just then, they heard a shout from the corner of the cafeteria.

“Oh! So I have to line up here, huh? And I have to pay for it, too? School food isn’t free?!” Keina shouted.

Akuto felt like he couldn’t just sit there and watch, so he stood up. Keina saw him and waved.

“Darling! Help me! I can’t figure out how the caf-ay-ter-ya works!”

“Are you having trouble?” Akuto walked over to her.

The whole cafeteria started to murmur. Everyone in the school knew his face and name. Of course, they had a bad impression of him.

The students surrounding her, who had been angry that Keina had cut in line all backed off quickly, opening an easy path to her.

—I’d really prefer you guys weren’t that scared of me.

But Akuto had a bad habit of trying to show off when he was in public. He chose his words carefully, trying to be as polite as possible, as he waved at them.

“I’m sorry. She’s an exchange student, and she doesn’t know how things work here. She doesn’t have any money either, it looks like.”

When he said that, several of the students quickly took out their wallets and offered her money.

—*Th-That’s not what I meant...*

But Keina cheerfully took one of the bills she was offered.

“Thank you! You should’ve just done that to begin with! Oh, I’ll take the lunch su-pe-shal of the day!”

“Uhm...” Akuto tried to stop her, but she’d already ordered.

—*That’s not right.*

Akuto began to frown without realizing it, and in response, tension ran through the people around him. Nobody moved an inch. On the other side of the cafeteria, people were already starting to run away.

Akuto walked up to the student who’d given money to Keina. The poor boy was shaking and his face was twitching.

“Y-Yes?! Wh-What do you need?”

“I wasn’t asking for money, so I’ll just pay you back. I intended to pay for her anyway, so don’t worry about it.” He offered the student some money. The student took it with trembling hands.

“The guy who paid was an idiot. The Demon King’s famous for trying to hit on every girl he sees. So that kid just interrupted him when he was trying to show off.”

“Oh, so that’s why he was glaring at him. The poor guy’s gonna be the first to die, I bet.”

The students around him were whispering to each other.

—*That’s not what I meant, though...*

Akuto sighed to himself, but then Keina grabbed his hand. Her other hand was holding a tray with the lunch special.

“Darling, let’s go sit down and eat! You know, the Empire’s food comes with

so many little dishes! I couldn't believe it! There's not enough food for a classy girl like me, though!"

The students began to whisper again as Akuto led Keina across the cafeteria.

"Hmm... Why do all the cute girls go for him?"

"Well, he's the Demon King. He's probably really amazing, in a lot of different ways."

"I'm kind of jealous..."

"And kind of not..."

He listened to the other students comments as he walked across the cafeteria. When he got back to where Hiroshi was sitting, Keena was there too.

"Hi Ackie! And Keina.. Hmm, that's kind of weird to say, so Doronz... Doro, maybe? Doro's with you too?" Keena said as she wolfed down her lunch.

At her special request, the school had made her her own unique lunch. There was white rice, deep-fried rice (rice fried in a rice-based batter), rice salad, rice paper spring rolls, and rice vermicelli soup. Essentially, it was a meal of nothing but white rice. This special "K Lunch," as they called it, was in theory something anybody could order. But nobody but her had ever finished it.

"She was making a fuss over there, so I brought her here."

"I don't understand how this caf-ay-ter-ya's system works! It's very unkind of them not to explain it!" Keina said as she sat down and began to eat. She'd ordered the daily "A Lunch," which was very normal. But after she took a bite of the fried shrimp, she tried some rice, she shook her head in disgust.

"Oh! What is this 'rice' stuff? It's completely inedible! It's not fit food for a classy girl like me!"

Then for once, Keena got angry.

"That's not true! Rice is delicious!"

"*You* might think so, but I think it's awful. That's all there is to it!" Keina said, but Keena refused to back down.

"It doesn't matter if tastes good or not. It's nutritious, and that's what counts.

It's nutritionally complete! People can survive off nothing else!"

—No, you'd get sick from lack of vitamins...

Akuto thought to himself.

But Keina began to shake her head violently.

"Nutritious or not, you can't eat just one thing! And who gave you the right to boss me around, anyway? I'm going to have bread instead!"

Keina stood up and used the rest of the money she had to buy a sandwich, which she brought back to the table. She put it down on the table and declared in a loud voice, "Man can live by bread alone!"

—I don't know if that's right...

But Keena began to shake her head violently.

"It takes 88 steps to make rice, you know!"

The two of them began to argue, as one ate her rice and the other ate her sandwich.

"Boss, nobody's eating that A Lunch, are they?" Hiroshi pointed to Keina's tray. Only one bite had been taken out of the fried shrimp. The rest was untouched.

"...Let's split it."

While Keena and Keina argued, Hiroshi and Akuto finished not only their own meals, but the A Lunch as well. By the time they were done, the two girls had moved to arguing over Akuto.

"You know, the first time I saw you, I really, REALLY, didn't like you! You're jealous of me and my darling too, aren't you?" Keina grabbed Akuto's arm.

"I'm not jealous! Ackie and I are friends! We made a promise!" Keena slammed her fists down on the table.

Keina looked down at her with a smirk.

"Hehe. Friends. So you can just sit back and watch as we go on a date then!"

“A date?” Keena looked surprised.

Keina pressed her body up against Akuto.

“Don’t you know what a date is? It’s when you want to see if you can be boyfriend and girlfriend, so you go to a classy, relaxing, eco-friendly café and eat fancy sweets! You have some tea there and if you like each other, you’re boyfriend and girlfriend!”

—Is that how a date works? Maybe that’s just a Union thing?

Akuto frowned.

“If you like each other, you become boyfriend and girlfriend...?”

“That’s right. It’s up to the individual exactly how you say it, but after the tea, the boy confesses his love to the girl. And then she either accepts it, or doesn’t. That is the turning point of their fate,” Keina said confidently.

Then she turned to Akuto and said, “Let’s go on a date after school, the day after tomorrow! You pick the spot! That’s the boy’s job! I want a place where you can eat elegant, classy sweets! An eco-friendly place that’s perfect for a date to accelerate our love!”

○

“And somehow I ended up agreeing to this...” Akuto said to the beautiful girl on his bed after he got home from school.

Soft green hair. A perfectly beautiful face, like a doll. She looked like some sculptor’s interpretation of the ideal young girl. But she was lying on the bed reading a magazine, eating ningyo-yaki snacks out of a bag next to her. Despite her beautiful appearance, she was acting like a middle-aged housewife or an unemployed young teen.

“I see,” Korone said. She was a Liradan who’d been sent by the government to be Akuto’s observer.

“I see...? Is that all you have to say?”

“My job isn’t to tell you how to run your personal life. And anyway, why are you telling me this, exactly?”

“Oh, right. Supposedly it’s after this that you decide if you want to be boyfriend and girlfriend, so I’m just going to tell her no, then.”

There was no doubt in his voice.

“That’s awfully sudden,” Korone said as she looked up from her magazine.

“I don’t really know her, is the thing. Of course, if I wanted to be her boyfriend it would be after we’d been friends for a while first. I don’t want to rush this,” Akuto said, sounding very serious. His straight-laced personality was both an asset and a flaw.

“Why not just tell her?”

“She’s insistent that she won’t hear my answer until after this date.”

“That’s a very strange thing for a human to say. It’s as if she’s insistent on following a series of steps,” Korone said thoughtfully.

“So anyway, it looks like I just have to play along with her steps. I was hoping you could tell me where I can find a place that you can eat elegant, classy sweets, at an eco-friendly place that’s perfect for a date to accelerate love,” Akuto said. His memory was impressive.

Korone sat up on the bed and looked at him.

“Couldn’t you look that up online?”

“Of course, I tried. But none of the places felt quite right.”

Akuto took out his student handbook and called up a mana screen to display the cafés he’d found. All of them were aimed at a much older clientele. There was a café that converted to a bar in the evenings, a café that served exclusively cold-brew coffee, one with tatami mats and green tea that was members only, one that was decorated in the style of an obscure foreign ethnic group, *etc.*

“None of these are right for a high school date, no. How did you get these?”

“I searched for places with elegant classy sweets that were also eco-friendly, and perfect for accelerating love. This is what I ended up with. No, the part about accelerating love was too abstract for me to really understand,” Akuto’s face was dead-serious.

Korone looked back at him with a serious expression as well.

“I’ve been thinking for a while that you are an idiot.”

“It’s something I feel bad about. But this is also a place where I have no knowledge or experience.” Akuto’s face became even more serious.

Korone looked back at him with an even more serious expression.

“I’ll give you some advice. A good place for a date is a couple’s café.”

“A couple’s café?” Akuto didn’t seem to understand, so Korone began to explain carefully.

“A couple’s café is a place you can only go to as a couple. The booths are divided and very cramped, so you have to sit next to each other. Many of them have self-service drink bars, and no waiters. The light is as low as possible, and it’s set up so nobody around you can see what you’re doing.”

“Do you mean...”

“Even if some kind of sexual act is performed there, the café owners will not ask you to stop. There’s also cafés devoted to exhibitionism, where the lights are lit up brightly and the drink corner and play rooms are separated. Many people at these cafés prefer to go as two sets of husband and wife, and enjoy watching each other as they swap partners. There are also cafés where men can go alone, where events called ‘happenings’ will occur, where a naked woman will suddenly come up and offer to have sex with you. Whether you accept or not is up to you.”

Korone suddenly stuck a finger out at Akuto. He sighed.

“I see. You’re not going to give me a real answer, are you?”

“Correct. Why would I want to help someone else fall in love? Especially with the boy I like,” she said.

“Huh?” Akuto looked at her in surprise.

Korone pressed her lips together tightly, and then slowly stuck out her tongue like a sheet of fax paper. She made an “akanbe” motion, pulling down on one eyelid, all with a flat expression.

“Just kidding.”

“...You tease me often enough that I’d like to think I’m used to it, but those expressionless jokes of yours always get to me...” Akuto’s head slumped.

Korone made it worse by raising up both hands behind her head to give herself bunny ears. She remained completely expressionless.

“Just kidding.”

○

The next morning, Akuto continued to struggle with his choice of café. And Keina Doronz was only making matters worse.

“Did you find the perfect classy, relaxing, eco-friendly café where you can go and eat fancy sweets?”

“No, not quite yet. But I’m working on it.”

“I expected more from you, my darling. But I know you’re up to the task! No, if you can’t do it, just order the lower classes around you to help!”

Keina pointed to the other students. Of course, none of them looked happy. None of them were willing to say anything in front of Akuto, though.

“You shouldn’t say things like that.” Akuto said, but Keina just ignored him.

“Oh, darling! You’re so kind to the commoners, aren’t you?”

“That’s not what I meant...”

—I’m not sure if she’s a selfish person, or just young and childish...

As he thought about it, he suddenly heard a voice.

“Today’s class is a practical exercise.”

It was Junko.

“Oh, Hattori. I see. It’s practicals today. Doronz, what do you want to do?” Akuto asked. Junko frowned.

“Do you have time to worry about the exchange student? I’m the only one who can face you, so I need you focused on me.”

The Academy’s main goal was to teach magic, so the primary classes were

magical practicals. These classes included learning to control destructive magic, so they could be quite dangerous. Akuto was always causing trouble in them because he had more magic than he could control.

“Alright. I’ll do my best not to hurt you.”

If somebody else had said those words, they might’ve sounded arrogant. But in Akuto’s case, it was just his bad habit again. Junko blushed.

“Y-You dummy. Don’t be weird.”

Then Keina, who had been listening in on their conversation, interrupted them.

“Hah! Don’t make me laugh! You’re no match for my darling!”

“What’s with you and this ‘darling’ stuff? You’re an exchange student, so I was willing to cut you some slack, but I can’t do that when it comes to magic class. Magic is Imperial technology. If you don’t take this seriously, you’ll really get hurt.”

Junko and Keina glared at one another.

“There’s nothing wrong with my magic. If my darling and I pair up, we’ll be just fine!”

“That’s exactly what I’m talking about. Imperial technology is...”

“They told me this country is a bunch of nationalists who hate foreigners, and I guess they were right, huh?!”

“What? Fine, then pair up with him and get blasted flat on your butt! Then you’ll regret how stupid you’re being!” With that, Junko left angrily.

—*Well, jeez...*

Akuto didn’t know what to do, but it was still time for class. Today they were practicing the use of telekinesis to do detailed work. They were going to learn to use magic to move tiny parts with millimeter accuracy.

“There’s only a few micrometer gauges and sets of materials, so pair up. Once you can do it on your own, practice working together,” Miss Mitsuko said. And then she added, “Sai, make sure you’re far away from everyone else. You don’t

need to work with anyone else, either.”

The other students were sitting in front of sets of differently-sized blocks on their classroom desks, but Miss Mitsuko was pointing to a desk placed out in the middle of the schoolyard.

“Well, I know the reason for it, at least,” Akuto said as he obediently went out into the yard. But Keina followed behind him.

“Darling, let’s do our best, okay?”

“Huh? The teacher told me to do it on my own. You don’t need to risk doing this. I know that you might be bothered by what the class rep said, but...”

“Don’t worry. We can do this together!” Keina ran ahead and then brought him out into the yard.

“It’s not that easy. This delicate stuff is what I’m worst at. It sound stupid, but it’s like trying to open a can with a missile. See? Everybody’s telling you to go back to your seat.” He turned back towards the classroom window. Miss Mitsuko and their classmates were motioning her to come back.

But Keina just laughed.

“Ahaha, it’s fine. Let’s just show them how it’s done. Let’s show them how strong the bond between us is!” Keina grabbed Akuto’s hand and moved it towards the blocks on the desk.

“Listen, this is a bad idea...” Akuto trailed off as he felt a warmth in his arm where Keina held it.

—*What? I feel power...*

“See? It’s just fine.” Keina smiled at him.

Of course, Akuto had no intention of using his power. But the hand on his arm was covered with a faint flow of mana.

Most mana was dispersed into the air. To use magic, you linked it with the mana in your body. The more powerful the mana, the more difficult it was to control. And controlling the mana in someone else’s body was extremely difficult. Everyone’s mana had a unique frequency that could only be produced by their own brainwaves.

—It's resonating with my unique frequency?

That was the only explanation he could come up with. Keina was perfectly controlling the mana within his body.

Akuto's surprise spread to the other classmates. Miss Mitsuko was displaying a mana screen for them that showed Akuto and Keina. The blocks on the desk were being manipulated exactly how they were supposed to be. The smallest of them, practically the size of powder, were kept inside a box of transparent plastic. Akuto lifted these out to form a wall.

"Th-That's impossible!"

Junko couldn't help but raise her voice in shock.

○

"An exchange student?" Fujiko Eto asked.

Fujiko was the girl's dorm mother, a beautiful girl with the best grades in school who was loved by everyone. But she was secretly a black mage who worshiped Akuto.

One of the few people who knew about her secret identity, Lily Shiraishi, was sitting in front of her. Fujiko had been summoned to the student council room.

"Yes. That's what the paperwork says. But the fact is, nobody knows anything about her." Lily rubbed the brim of her fancy hat with her fingers while she spoke.

"Well, that's certainly unnerving. How is it possible for someone in the Empire to be a complete unknown? If you've brought me here to tell me ghost stories, I'm afraid we'll have to do this another time." said Fujiko, looking a little bored.

Lily brought up a mana screen on the desk that showed video of Akuto's classroom from earlier.

"As you can see from this, it seems that this involves Akuto, somehow."

The screen showed Keina helping Akuto with his mana control practice.

"Th-This is...!" Fujiko gasped.

"Correct. I don't know how she did it, but she managed to get control of

Akuto Sai's mana. Which means..." Lily tried to say more, but Fujiko cut her off.

"How dare she touch my Akuto?!" She slammed her fists down on Lily's desk in rage. Lily winced a little.

"...No, that's not what's important here."

"Ha—! Haha... Hahaha...! It was a joke, of course! Yes, this is fascinating!" Fujiko was laughing, but she seemed to have understood the seriousness of the situation. She looked Lily in the eyes with a serious expression.

"You said we don't know who she is, correct?"

"Correct. She seems to have just appeared out of nowhere. And to make matters worse, she was found in the crater left behind after that battle."

By "that battle," she was referring to the fight that had taken place earlier, where Akuto had turned into the Demon King and destroyed the god Suhara. But after that fight, almost everyone had lost their memories of Akuto, and instead believed that a different Demon King had killed Suhara, instead.

"Which means that she might have something to do with whatever it was that erased everyone's memories." Fujiko crossed her arms.

"Correct. The being known as the Law of Identity... it seems to be some kind of mysterious will that manifests through the body of Keena Soga."

"And you called me here to find out who this exchange student is?" Fujiko asked. But Lily shook her head.

"No, I don't think we're going to get anywhere with that. There's nowhere to even begin. I just wanted to make sure that this wasn't some new trick of yours, that's all." Lily looked at Fujiko, a challenge in her gaze.

Fujiko's eyes narrowed. She wasn't happy, but she knew what Lily was getting at.

"I understand why you'd suspect me, but the cells of Akuto's that I was cultivating, and the research I did into his unique waveform, have nothing to do with this. Just before the battle ended, the pot I had was stolen, I'm embarrassed to say."

"By that rubber man?" Lily looked surprised.

Fujiko nodded.

Lily grimaced.

“Then they used it to... No, the timeline doesn’t match up,” Lily mumbled to herself, and then waved a hand. “Okay, got it. Thanks. Sorry for making you come all this way.”

“No, it was worth it to see that exchange student with my own eyes.”

“Are you going to look into her? Well, just don’t make too much of a mess.”

“No, I’m just spoiling for a fight now, that’s all.” Fujiko started to laugh with a cruel look on her face.

○

After school, Junko heard someone call out to her.

“Hattori, there was something I wanted you to tell me.”

“To tell you?” Junko repeated, and then she saw who it was who’d stopped her.

It was Akuto. Keina had been following him around everywhere since yesterday, but now she was nowhere to be found. Maybe she’d gone back to the dorms.

“You want me to tell you something? That’s rare.” Junko coughed. She’d realized they were alone and suddenly felt nervous.

It was just the two of them in the hallway at twilight. And come to think of it, during the war she’d loudly declared that she’d give up her family to be with Akuto, but she hadn’t actually told him that yet.

“S-So, um... what is it?” She turned her face towards the sunset so he couldn’t see how red she was.

“I was wondering if you knew of any cafés I could use for a date,” Akuto said, his voice calm and natural.

“A-A date?” Junko’s voice quivered in shock.

“Yeah. I can’t find anything myself. I asked Korone, but she just started acting strange.”

“I-I-I-I... see...” Junko began to panic violently.

“Are you okay?”

“I-I’m fine. A-Anyway... Hmm... The place in front of the station... No, that’s not good for a date. Take a right out of the station and then head down the street. Once you’re out of the shopping area and into the suburb, keep going and you’ll find a café with an open terrace. The owner’s a pastry chef, and you can buy little cakes at the store next door,” she said. Akuto nodded, satisfied.

“That should work fine.”

“It’s best to make reservations a day in advance if you can. B-By the way, when are you going to go?”

“Tomorrow.”

“Oh, tomorrow. I see.”

—This is so sudden. What should I do? Buy new clothes? No, it’d feel weird to go that far. I need to be subtle. But if he’s inviting me on a date, that means things are almost certainly going to be fine. I just need to act natural and it will all work out.

...But if I agree to it too soon, he might think I’m easy. It doesn’t seem right to give him that much control over the relationship. That’s right. Why not say I’m busy and act a little hesitant? It might be nice to see him get a little upset...

When she was done thinking, she began to speak, still turning away from him.

“I’ve actually got some plans for tomorrow... No, it’s nothing important. My sister has an event she invited me to. But if this is really that important, I can go with you instead. I mean, my sister does those events all the time. Haha... Hahaha...”

But she was speaking so softly that Akuto didn’t hear her.

“This is a huge help. Doronz insists she wants a place where you can eat elegant, classy sweets, an eco-friendly place that’s perfect for a date to accelerate our love, and I had no idea what to tell her.” Akuto smiled, completely oblivious.

In an instant, a chill ran down Junko’s spine like she’d been dumped into the

arctic wastes.

“...Wait a second. You’re going on a date? With that exchange student?”

Akuto nodded innocently.

“Yeah. Well, I’m just going to go hang out with her, since she asked.”

“No... Wait... You’re going on a date? With the exchange student? Just because she asked you to?”

“Well, she did ask, so it would be rude to turn her down. Am I wrong? Also, it looks like people from the Union don’t think of dates the same way we do. It’s much less of a big deal to them.”

“I-I see... That’s right. Haha... hahahaha...”

“A-Are you okay? You just went pale,” Akuto said, worried, but Junko was already staggering away in shock.

—I-I see... Why did I never think of that? All I have to do is ask, and he’ll go on a date with me. That’s right. Of course. That’s just the kind of guy he is...

○

“The observation target’s made reservations at a café? What’s its name? Café Bakhtin? What time?”

There was a look of tension on the local Knight Captain’s face as he received the telepathic call. He immediately began to take down notes in his book.

The air in the knight garrison suddenly became tense. Twenty veteran knights were in the room, busy at their duties, but all of them stood up to watch the expression on the Captain’s face.

“...Roger. We’ll do everything we can to secure the area.”

The Captain ended the call. There was a mix of fear and anticipation on everyone’s face as he spoke to them.

“The Cabinet just called. The potential Demon King will be at Café Bakhtin tomorrow at 3:00 PM, on second avenue. Our job is to protect any civilians in the area!”

“Yes sir!” his men answered him with a shout.

Korone may have looked lazy, but she wasn't slacking off. She was constantly reporting on Akuto's actions to the government. And whenever he did something, the reports went immediately to the knight garrison of the town where Constant Magical Academy was located.

But Akuto was an orphan who lived in a dorm, so he almost never left the school grounds. For this reason, this would be the knights' first large-scale operation.

"Contact Café Bakhtin! Have one of our female knights infiltrate as a waitress, and tell her to get her waitress training out of the way in the morning! We'll use security plan 1-B! Don't bring any weapons that would frighten the local populace! And don't forget to contact the surrounding garrisons for help! And what's more important than anything: don't let the citizens get hurt!" the Captain yelled.

The knights in the room began to add red dots onto the mana screen map in the middle of the garrison.

And the next day became the longest day of the Captain's life.

○

"Um... you really didn't need to do this..."

Akuto seemed uneasy. He was looking at himself in a mirror, dressed in casual clothes. The clothes were carefully coordinated, something he'd never have thought to do on his own, and he'd even been given some accessories to wear.

Fujiko was the one who had dressed him. He hadn't owned a lot of clothing to begin with, but she'd told him what to wear, and it had paid off.

"No, you need have confidence in your appearance at all times. You're the Demon King I worship, after all!" Fujiko laughed as she adjusted his collar, then ran a comb through his carefully-waxed hair.

Fujiko had taken over the Academy's Home-Ec room to help Akuto change out of his uniform. The two of them together, in their personal clothes, looked like something out of a magazine.



Outside the window there were many girls, and a few boys, trying to peer in.

“Miss Fujiko is so beautiful!”

“But why is she helping the Demon King?”

“I hate to say it, but he’s good looking. If only he wasn’t the Demon King...”

“No, even if he wasn’t the Demon King, I still wouldn’t like him!”

“That’s right! He’s taken our Fujiko away... But we couldn’t beat him a fight, could we?”

The students were talking amongst themselves.

Fujiko watched them out of the corner of her eye as she saw Akuto off.

“Alright,” she said, “You’re all set. Have fun.”

She smiled gently at Akuto as he bowed a little and left the room, but inside he was suspicious about the way she was behaving. There was no way, he thought, that Fujiko would let him be friends with another girl.

Of course, he was right. As soon as she saw him round the corner, Fujiko quickly cleaned up the Home-Ec room and began to tail him.

“I’m not letting her have a date with him! If it was anybody but that mysterious exchange student, I would’ve already sent her to hell.”

As soon as she saw that there were no students around her, Fujiko’s face took on an evil smile.

“That’s right. I’d like to solve the mystery of the exchange student as well,” a voice said out of nowhere.

At some point, Korone had come up behind Fujiko.

“W-When did you get behind me...?”

“It wasn’t particularly difficult. Also, as an observer, it’s natural for me to follow my target.”

Korone seemed intent on going into town as well. For once, she wasn’t wearing her uniform.

“Gaah... This is going to make things more difficult, but fine,” Fujiko sighed,

and she let Korone follow her as she trailed after Akuto.

Once Akuto was outside the school gates, Fujiko ran into another pursuer.

“F-Fujiko...! What are you doing here?” Junko stammered as soon as she saw them.

“...That’s my question. No, I suppose there’s no point in asking.”

Of course, Junko was in her personal clothes as well. Three girls were now tailing Akuto.

Akuto was waiting for Keina Doronz in front of the school gate. She was dressed in a perky, feminine outfit that seemed just like what a girl from the Union would wear.

“I see. If she’s going for sporty, maybe I should’ve gone a little lighter on the fancy aspect?”

Fujiko was starting to question her own fashion choices. Junko frowned.

“Fujiko, why aren’t you more worried? Normally, you don’t act like this at all.”

“Hahaha... I’m not letting her have that date easily. The necklace I lent to Akuto has a magic spell on it. When anyone in the vicinity consumes caffeine, they lose self-control in the same way they would if they were drunk. Actually, it functions more like a truth serum to be precise... We’ll learn exactly what that exchange student is up to!” Fujiko chuckled, and Junko took a step away from her.

“Th-That’s terrifying... That means in the worst case, she might get drunk and make Akuto hate her... And if it goes well, we might even learn who she really is...”

“That’s right. And Akuto’s bracelet has a spell cast on it to protect him from it. Akuto won’t be affected by the necklace at all!” Fujiko said, satisfied, but Korone mumbled to herself.

“There’s no way this ends in anything but insanity. That’s what happens when you rely on secret magic items. Everyone knows that, don’t you?”

“Everyone does NOT know that!” Fujiko yelled.

Junko put her head in her hands.

“Oh, why did I come along with this... I should’ve just gone to Yuko’s event.”

Meanwhile, Junko’s little sister, Yuko, was announcing her new song under the name ‘Yuri Hoshino’ at a nearby department store. She would have nothing to do with the events that followed.

○

(The target has passed by the station.) A man in a suit, who looked to be waiting for someone, sent a telepathic message as soon as he saw Akuto and Keina pass. He was a knight in disguise.

There were others as well: a housewife, a deliveryman, and a man walking his dog. All of them reported when Akuto passed by.

But it wasn’t just the knights who were nervous.

“I-Is that...”

“The student at the Academy who everybody’s talking about...”

The townspeople knew Akuto’s face from the students at Constant Magical Academy. Since the knights hadn’t warned them, they suddenly found the Demon King in their midst without warning.

The shutters started to come down on the shopping street, and mothers quickly led their children away. The only people still outside were the knights in disguise.

(We made a mistake. The people in town know more about the Demon King than we expected!) (Is that why this is happening? We just got another report! Followers of the Demon King are entering the city to make contact with the target!) (Can we stop them?)

(We can set up a cordon, but the followers are civilians! If they break through we’ll need a plan!) The knights began to murmur among themselves.

Of course, Akuto noticed something was wrong.

—*Oh jeez... Do they even know me in town...? From now on, I’ll just stay indoors.*

Akuto felt sad as he watched the shutters close.

“Why is every place closing? I was going to have you buy me things!” Keina pouted.

“Well, you know, they’ve got their reasons. I don’t have any money, anyway. I couldn’t buy you anything expensive even if you asked me to.”

“Well, there’s a bank right there! Banks have money, right?”

“Banks have money, but I don’t.” Akuto’s shoulders slumped.

“Then go get some!”

(The targets are plotting a bank robbery!) (Send some knights to the bank, now!) (Hurry! If they enter the bank, you are permitted to use your weapons!) “You shouldn’t talk about doing things like that. It’s not right.” Akuto shook his head.

“Then how are you going to get money?” Keina asked, confused.

—It looks like she really doesn’t know, huh?

Akuto was surprised. He felt like he should explain.

“You’re supposed to work for it. If you don’t work, you need starting principal. You can use it to buy stocks, and then sell them... Basically, you buy ownership in a company, do a good job of running it, and then when it grows you sell the company, something like that. Basically, those are the only ways.”

“Oh! I don’t really understand, but it sounds complicated!” Keina put her hands up to her head.

“That’s right. But someday, I want to participate in society by helping run a company.”

(There’s a possibility the Demon King has already bought stock! Have the people at the Fund do a full search! See if anybody’s customer list has the Demon King on it!) (The girl next to him is from the Union! Check to see if foreign money laundering is involved!) Oblivious to the chaos they were causing behind them, Akuto and Keina arrived at their goal: Café Bakhtin.

“Welcome,” the manager bowed.

The manager really worked there, but all the other waitresses and customers were knights in disguise.

“Good, this place is still open.”

Akuto motioned for Keina to sit down first as he looked around. There was an odd atmosphere of tension in the café.

—*Looks like they’re keeping an eye on me, yeah.*

No matter what happened, he would be on his best behavior today, he swore to himself.

Meanwhile, the three pursuers were hiding across the street, drinking from juice cans while they watched them.

“This is pathetic, isn’t it? Staking out somebody else’s date.”

“All we get is juice cans, too. But just you wait. You’re about to see a true nightmare unfold. Hehehe...”

Junko and Fujiko were whispering to each other. The two of them both seemed sad, somehow, but Korone was taking it easy.

“Looks like their date is going well,” Korone said. She was expressionless, but still seemed excited somehow as she took out a bag of ningyo-yaki and started to chow down. She was clearly in the mood to watch.

“You’re not very concerned about this, are you?” Fujiko asked.

“Is watching someone else’s date that much fun?”

Korone nodded and replied, “A little, yeah.”

Korone had said that the date was going well, and indeed, from the outside the two of them looked like the perfect couple. Akuto had sworn to stay on his best behavior, and he’d done his best to keep to that promise towards both Keina and the surrounding customers.

Since he was an orphan, Akuto had worked to save up the money to get into the Academy, and he knew how to behave around other people. He had Keina decide what to order, being careful to hide the fact that she knew so little about everything when talking with the waitress.

Since he'd worked in a place that served food, he knew what items would make life particularly difficult for the cooks if they were ordered, and he deliberately ordered something that would be easy. Of course, he didn't let Keina know what he was doing, either.

Akuto was capable of being considerate if he wanted to be. The reason he wasn't, usually, was that he was incredibly dense around women. But, when he tried, sometimes he could cause misunderstandings. Even now, Keina's cheeks were beginning to get a little flushed.

He'd ordered them the perfect selection of sweets, and then given her an explanation of what tea would go best with them. He was polite towards the waitress, and even careful to keep the menus clean. And after he ordered, he laughed as he explained to her how Imperial customs worked. It would be stranger if Keina didn't get the wrong idea.

"H-He's never been that nice to me!" Fujiko bit down on her handkerchief.

"N-No, if you get the wrong idea there, you're in for a world of hurt later! That's just who he is! I know this from experience!" Junko had seen this scene play out too many times before.

"I can't wait to see what happens when the coffee gets here. Heheheheheh," Korone laughed with an expressionless mouth.

The waitress was trying her best to act normal, but she was clearly nervous as she brought the tray of tea and sweets to the table.

(The target is on his best behavior. Is it possible that he just wants to eat at the café?) She sent a telepathic message out in secret. But the Captain told her to focus.

(Don't let your guard down. It's said that the Demon Kings have always been gentlemen. We can't be sure he doesn't have some kind of plan...) "Here's the blueberry pie you ordered..." The waitress put down the sweets and tea in front of Akuto and Keina.

"That's my darling! You picked the perfect sweets for a classy, lug-jur-y-us, and eco-friendly place like this!" Keina was in a good mood.

"No, I actually wasn't the one who picked this place."

“That’s just fine! Anyway, darling, you’re the best!” Keina’s mood improved even more as she took a bite of the cake. “They’re using really good wheat for this!”

“I’m glad you like it. I can’t tell if the wheat is good, but it’s definitely delicious.” Akuto nodded and took a sip of the tea.

The necklace and bracelet began to give off a dull light. Then, Keina took a sip out of her teacup.

“There we go!”

“Yes!”

“She drank it, huh?”

Fujiko, Junko, and Korone all yelled at once.

If the magic took effect, Akuto should have been unaffected, while Keina should be under the effects of a truth serum. The three of them watched to see what would happen next.

“Hey, darling, there’s something I haven’t told you.” Keina put down her cup. Her tone was much gloomier than it had been a moment ago. She looked down and put her hands on her knees. Akuto could tell something was wrong, and he didn’t know what to do.

“W-What’s wrong?”

“Actually, I don’t have any memories.”

Akuto had no idea what to say to this sudden confession, so for now he just said, “Huh?”

“I don’t know when I was born, or how I got here...” She covered her face with her hands and began to cry.

“Wait a second. What are you talking about?”

“I’m sorry, it’s silly to just start crying like this. But it’s true, and when I think about how it’s true, I just get so sad...”

“You don’t have any memories? Like you have amnesia?” Akuto asked. Keina shook her head.

“No, that’s not what I mean. I think... I was just born a little while ago. I can tell.”

“Huh...? Then your memory of me at the orphanage...”

Keina shook her head harder.

“No, those are real! That’s a real memory! But it’s all I have. It’s the only memory I have!”



Akuto may have been dense, but he even he could tell that either his own magic, or the Law of Identity, was probably involved. But what was more important than that was that the girl in front of him was crying.

“That’s why I was so scared until I met you... I was all alone in a world where I knew nothing... And then someone from the government took me in and brought me to you.”

Keina continued her confession as she sobbed, and her words weighed heavily on his heart. Akuto was an orphan too, and thought he understood what it was like to not know your own past.

“It’ll be okay. If you don’t know about anything but me, then I’ll teach you all kinds of things,” Akuto said.

“I-Is she crying deliberately to get that reaction out of him? This isn’t going the way I’d hoped...” Junko panicked.

“Aaah! Akuto is so kind...! But that kindness belongs to me, not to her!” Fujiko ripped the handkerchief in half.

“It seems like Keina Doronz’s big revelation is what’s important here...” Korone said, but the other two weren’t listening.

“Akuto, do you like me?” Keina looked up at him with wet eyes.

“Um...” Akuto froze. It seemed wrong to give a thoughtless answer. From the way Keina had behaved so far, it was clear that she was like an innocent child.

“I think that if I’m all you remember, it’s natural for you to spend a lot of time thinking about me.”

“That’s not the answer I want! Tell me...”

She started to sob again. And then the mana around Akuto started to stir. His own hand moved without him telling it to.

—*Huh?*

Akuto couldn’t believe it. He didn’t want it to, but his hand was moving slowly forward.

—*My hand’s moving on its own?*

His hand was placed gently on her head. Keina looked up in surprise.

—Is Doronz not controlling this herself?

He was surprised at her behavior, but his hand was definitely doing what Keina would have wanted it to do. It went down to stroke her face and wipe away her tears. In that instant, the two of them looked like lovers who'd promised their futures to one another.

"Th-This is going too far! I-I'll kill him! I'll kill him, and then I'll die!" Junko moved to pull out a hidden dagger.

Korone, for her part, had taken a back scratcher out from somewhere, and was using it to keep Junko's hand away from the dagger while she tilted her head in confusion.

"There's a strange mana flow coming out of Keina Doronz... Wait, you two aren't listening at all."

Fujiko's hairs were all standing on end, and she had the face of a demon.

"Gaaah! This wasn't the plan! This wasn't supposed to happen! But just in case, I put a booster on that necklace! If I set it to full power, Doronz will pass out drunk! She'll humiliate herself, and then hopefully piss her pants and humiliate herself even more! Hahaha... Gwahahaha...!"

"At this point, I'm not even sure what's going on," Korone said, but she didn't try to stop Fujiko.

"Take this!" Fujiko yelled, as she took out a control device and turned the dial to maximum.

The effects appeared instantly.

(Something's going on with the target. The girl is crying! Should we assume the Demon King threatened her?) (No, from the contents of their conversation, it seems like an internal dispute...) But suddenly, the knights' telepathic call was disrupted.

(I'm sorry... I know I'm on a mission, but I don't feel well...) (No, wait. Me too. Is this some kind of magic...) The other knights who were pretending to be customers all started to feel sick, as well. They started to slump in their chairs,

like they couldn't take it anymore. Some fell flat onto the table.

The "customers" had been there long enough that they'd ordered several cups of coffee, so they were affected by Fujiko's magic, as well.

"I'm sorry, there's something I need to tell you," one of the knights said, not telepathically, but directly. "I'm actually sleeping with your wife!"

It was a shocking confession, particularly when delivered in a voice loud enough to hear throughout the whole café.

Of course, this was the power of the necklace's magic.

The knight he was talking to was almost passed out drunk, but his mouth had gone wide open in shock. But what he said was even more shocking.

"I've been selling off garrison equipment on the black market for the past five years, and I've made several million off of it! And I've spent it all on Miss Takayanagi, the girl at the front desk!"

"Well, now you've done it," Korone said, strangely calm.

"O-Oh no! This thing wasn't supposed to be that powerful... They must have all had a lot of caffeine..." Fujiko quickly tried to turn down the dial.

But...

Snap

"Oops."

"Well, I saw that coming. I think we all knew that was going to happen, in fact," Korone said in the calm tone of an observer.

Fujiko stared down in shock at the broken equipment in her hands.

"Fujiko, let's just watch and see what happens. We can tell ourselves that we did a good thing by revealing corruption within the knights' ranks," Junko said optimistically. Perhaps, at this point, she was beyond caring.

"Th-That's right. Anyway, at least we knocked out Doronz." Fujiko seemed to have decided that she would take no responsibility for this at all.

"We created a lot of chaos in doing so, though. Ha," Korone said with an emotionless laugh.

The café's open terrace was in an uproar.

"You bastard! How dare you sleep with my wife?"

"Katsuko said you were too much of a wimp to please her! She was crying, you asshole!"

"Stay out of my family problems! I'll blow you away! Knight Garrison Special Attack: Volcano Eruption!"

"Stop making so much noise and just lie down and cry! Sword Tornado!"

Part of the terrace was blown away. The knights' magic had collided.

Of course, the Captain was listening via telepathy, and he began to give orders.

(Calm down! We're on a mission right now! Until it's over, forget what anybody says!) "But are we supposed to just ignore the fact that he's robbing us blind?"

One of the other knights, his face bright red, was storming up to the knight who'd confessed to stealing from the garrison.

"It's that greedy bitch's fault! All she ever talks about is money!"

"That's because you're willing to give it to her!"

The two of them took out the electromagnetic blades they used for city patrols and began to hack at each other. The tables around them were knocked back and began to fall apart.

"Uwah!" Akuto jumped on top of Keina to protect her.

A chair hit him hard in the back, but it wasn't enough to bother him.

—But... What am I supposed to do in this situation?

Akuto wasn't sure. This was probably because of something Fujiko had done, but since he didn't know the details, there was nothing he could do to stop it.

—I should run... but if I do, the knights will follow me. Maybe it's safer to stay put.

He looked around, and saw that while the drunk knights were fighting, the

sober ones were gathering and...

Keeping their distance.

—Why aren't they putting a stop to this?

(They caught us off guard! The Demon King's followers broke through our cordon!"

(Fool! How did that happen?!) (Hearing about the thefts and other things distracted us!) The Captain groaned to himself.

(Who cares if somebody's cheating on somebody else? The Captain has a bastard kid!) (The way the Lieutenant's crimes were covered up was way worse than that!) Shocking truths were being revealed every minute at Café Bakhtin. Unless it violated the rules of your religion, magical powers couldn't be stopped. And looking at someone's life log without evidence of a crime was forbidden for privacy reasons. But still, the Captain was shocked to see how many crimes, or almost-crimes, were going on in his unit. Of course, the fact that his own secret had been revealed didn't help.

(I-I told them about that kid because I trusted them... Gah! It doesn't matter! Capture the Demon King's followers!) (N-No, well you see...)

(What's wrong?)

(The citizens heard the noise and are gathering around the café to protest!) (Stop them! Get them away from here!) The Captain was on the verge of tears.

The scene before Akuto was something straight out of hell. Keina was crying like a little girl in his arms. And next to him, drunken knights were revealing their deepest secrets as they battled each other with magic.

On the edge of the terrace, the manager of Café Bakhtin was trying his hardest to keep his café from being destroyed. And past that, the sober knights were running out of the café as angry citizens started to swarm the building.

—I thought I just came here for a date...

Beyond them, he could hear strange sounds, and saw a dust cloud approaching him.

—What's going on here? The war almost seemed better than this...

Akuto sighed to himself.

“Wh-What’s this strange sound?” Junko looked around her.

It was hard to see anything. The three of them were already surrounded by a crowd of townspeople who’d gathered to protest the Knights’ lewdness and corruption. Of course, a lot of them were just there to watch, but still, the space around the café was jam-packed.

A strange sound was echoing from the back of the crowd. It was a mixture of loud music and what sounded like static screeching.

“Wave pattern analysis shows it to be musical instruments,” Korone said, her hands around her ears.

“Who would bring a musical instrument to something like this?” Junko asked in surprise, and then turned to look.

The sound suddenly got louder.

GYAAAN!

There was an ear-splitting roar as the crowd of people around them split in two. The townspeople were covering their ears as they tried to flee from the sound.

“Wh-What is that?” Junko’s jaw dropped open.

There were men in strange outfits at the back of the crowd — five men in total, all wearing black leather. They were all wearing either leather belts strapped over bare skin, or black shirts. They’d decked themselves out with silver skull jewelry and steel spikes all over their clothing.

But that wasn’t the weird part. Their faces were all painted with white and black makeup. The area around their lips and eyes had been colored black, giving them an eerie, intimidating look. And there were incantations in the language of magic written on their faces, as well.

All five of them had instruments. They were a twin guitar band, it seemed. The vocalist, a man with long black hair, howled: “You are in the presence of the Demon King! Bow before him, weaklings!”

“What...?” Junko was so surprised that she turned to look at Korone.

“Those are some of the Demon King’s followers. A type of band called black metal. They write extreme lyrics about worshiping the Demon King. Of course, I think they dress up that way just for fashion’s sake...”

Her explanation was cut off by Fujiko’s shout.

“Th-That’s the extreme black metal band ‘Black Demon King’!”

“You know them? ... Do you really hang out with people who’d call themselves something like that?” Junko asked, a little shocked. Fujiko shook her head.

“No, don’t let the name fool you. Black Demon King isn’t just playing dress-up. They’re all members of real black magic circles, who’ve given up their divine baptism. Their leader has an arrest record. They’re a real black metal band, and the only times they switch members is when one’s been arrested or assassinated by another black mage!”

“Ugh... Is that true?”

“Yes... I haven’t abandoned my baptism, because I still need to use magic. But the most fanatical black mages are so eager for the arrival of the Demon King that they’ll abandon their baptisms, even if it means giving up the ability to use magic!”

“So you’re saying...”

“That’s right. Ever since the Demon King War, Black Mages have been able to use magic. After the death of the god Suhara, their faith in the Demon King has reached its MAX!” Fujiko declared.

“Max!”

Peterhausen had functioned as a god for the black mages. He’d died, but before he’d gone to sleep he must have activated some subsystem. It was still providing magic to the unbaptized black mages.

“So that means they’ve come to see the Demon King...”

The band members forced their way through the crowd as they approached the café.

Their mana-powered instruments were in top form, and their hit song,

“Triumphant Return of the Demon King,” was echoing loudly.

The knights tried to stop them, but they couldn’t use any magic that would hurt the townspeople. As they hesitated, they soon found themselves swarmed by goth-loli girls, fans of the band.

“Stop them!” the Captain ordered, but he may as well not have said anything.

Black Demon King’s members arranged themselves out in front of the café. The drummer set up his drum set, and when they were all ready, the vocalist bowed deeply to Akuto and declared, “We are honored to be in the presence of the Demon King.”

As he spoke, Akuto was sitting on a chair in the center of the open terrace, with Keina resting on his lap. From a distance, it looked like he was watching the chaos with a dispassionate and uninterested expression.

But Akuto was actually too busy to pay any attention to what was going on around him; something strange was happening to Keina. She seemed like she was drunk, but her body was incredibly cold, like it might freeze your fingers if you touched it. Akuto wasn’t sure what to do, but he’d managed to get her up on his lap.

“A-Are you okay?” Akuto asked.

“I’m okay,” Keina said in a thin voice. “It doesn’t hurt... But... you know...”

Then she turned to look up at him. She seemed very sad.

“What’s wrong?”

“I want you to fall in love with me.”

Her words were so honest and pure that they drove deep into Akuto’s heart. But before he could answer her, his hand moved on its own.

—I’m not doing this... Is she doing it?

He felt the same mana flow in his body that he’d felt before in class.

His hand ignored his commands and gently stroked her hair, as he wrapped an arm around her waist.

“Don’t try to control me like that,” he said, but Keina just looked confused.

“What are you talking about?”

She didn't seem like she was lying. But his body gradually moved closer to hers, as his face was drawn towards her cheeks.

Keina looked genuinely surprised; he didn't think she could fake that expression.

—Is she doing it unconsciously?

Akuto wondered to himself as he tried to get his body back under his control. But despite his efforts, he couldn't do anything to stop its movements.

—This isn't good. Not for her, either.

To try and make his voice heard by her unconscious mind, Akuto said loudly, “Get away from me!”

“Get away? How cold! If we've done something wrong, please forgive us!”

The members of Black Demon King got on their knees and begged.

“Please! Please forgive us! We'll do anything!”

The band members thought that Akuto was talking to them, but of course, Akuto didn't hear them.

“Get... away? But you're getting closer to me!”

“You're controlling me unconsciously!”

“Everyone, abandon your hopes! Your hopes for the Demon King only serve as a burden to him! But this means that he has heard our wishes!”

“What do I do...? I don't know...”

“The loneliness you felt is burdening your heart. An unconscious power is trying to get that back.”

“The Demon King was lonely! Imprisoned within the Academy! Humiliated! But fear not, for he is about to get his power back!”

“Lonely...? Me?”

“You only cared about me. You thought that the only way you could be happy was for me to love you.”

“That’s right! You are everything to us, Demon King!”

“Ooooooh! What an honor! The Demon King himself knows of us!”

“But... that’s because I love you...”

“I know that. But that’s not right. You don’t know who I really am yet.”

“Wonderful! The Demon King is going to show us his true power!”

“He says that even when he killed a god, that wasn’t his true power! Show us your true power! Show us your true power!”

“The real... you?”

“There’s no need to hurry. You can make new memories from now on, little by little. I’ll be watching you.”

“That’s right! It’s about to begin! The legend is about to begin!”

“A nightmare that will remain in the people’s memories! An unforgettable nightmare! The Demon King is watching! He’s watching the whole world!”

“You’ll... be watching me?”

“That’s right. So grant me my wish. Don’t try to force everything around you to be under your control. Your feelings are tying me down.”

“The Demon King demands you grant him all you have! Grant him your money! Grant him your lives! Abandon all you have and worship the Demon King!”

“Yes! For the world to come! For the world to come!”

“I don’t understand what you’re saying... It’s too complicated...”

“Don’t worry. I’m about to begin. First, stay calm.”

Only when he said that did Keina stop controlling Akuto’s body. And at the same time, she passed out. It was only then that Akuto looked up and saw what was around him.

“The Demon King commands you to remain calm!”

“We shall make this land our own, and make of it a bridge to the future world!”

“This open terrace now belongs to Black Demon King! We shall remodel it into a concert hall! Out of the way, cowardly knights! Listen to this hymn of praise for our King, and sink into the abyss of despair!”

The band began to play what sounded like a black magic song.

“Uh... I’m sorry?” Akuto said, but by the time he had realized that things had gotten even worse, it was too late.

“Take them down! Ignore the knights who are drunk! Blow them away too if you have to!” the Captain’s order echoed.

The knights fired their attack magic, but their spells were stopped by a throat-crushing death metal scream from the vocalist.

“We are in the presence of the Demon King, and we must fight to prove ourselves!”

“Hang in there! Just keep fighting until reinforcements get here!”

And then, the quiet café in a residential street became a battlefield.

Explosions. Shouts. Guitar distortions. More embarrassing confessions from the knights. More insults and fighting. Screams. Shouts from the demonstrators.

The hatred and the smoke from the explosions was forming a spiral, with Akuto at its center. He was sitting there calmly with Keina resting on his lap. Of course, he actually just had no idea what to do, but to an outside observer he seemed to be calmly watching the chaos around him.

“How terrifying...”

“So that’s the power of the Demon King...”

“His mere presence is enough to cause confusion in the knights’ ranks, and bring chaos down around him!”

Junko could hear the townspeople whispering amongst themselves.

“This is awful...” she whispered as she looked around.

The knights seemed intent on blaming everything on the Demon King to cover up their own misdeeds. Some of them weren’t joining the battle. Instead, they were going around among the townspeople and trying their best to make things

worse.

“How shameless...” Junko’s hand went for her blade, but Korone stopped her again.

“No, for now, we need to get them out of here. If we can do something to distract everyone, I can get them out of here and back to the Academy.”

“Distract them? Can’t I do that by going on the attack?” Junko frowned. But then it was Fujiko’s turn to interrupt. And in a strangely calm voice, too.

“If you need a distraction, I’ve got one.”

“What?” When Junko turned around, Fujiko almost seemed to be blushing.

“The necklace has overloaded. It’s about to go out of control and explode. How embarrassing... Hahaha...”

“You gave him something dangerous without thinking about the consequences, didn’t you...?” Junko sighed.

“No, I believed that Akuto would be just fine. Hahaha...”

As soon as her voice trailed off, smoke began to rise from where Akuto had been sitting .

“Now!” Korone raised a hand high, showing off a transparent sheet in her hand.

“The invisible cover! Anyone under it will become invisible.”

“You don’t need to explain how it works.”

“Get out of here. We’re running away.”

And then, Akuto and Keina vanished.

After they’d left, the chaos remained. There were no deaths, but the price tag of the damage repairs had a lot of zeros.

The café became famous as the spot where the Demon King had made an appearance, and ended up as a haven for Demon King worshipers. Unable to attract paying customers, it went out of business and the owner vanished.

Afterwards, it became a concert hall for black metal bands.

"I thought I was just going on a date," Akuto sighed to himself.

Three people were kneeling on the floor in front of him: Junko, Fujiko, and Korone. Junko had felt guilty and decided to explain what had happened.

"I'm sorry, I tried to stop it, but I couldn't." Junko bowed her head, but Fujiko looked upset.

"You did NOT try to stop it! Don't pretend you're the only good girl here."

"This is mostly your fault, though!" Junko yelled, but Fujiko looked up at Akuto with pleading eyes.

"I only wanted to help you... you understand that, right?"

"No one is at fault here. Except Akuto, for not picking someplace sexier," Korone whispered.

"Don't be stupid! If you're an observer, you should've done something..."

"An observer's job isn't to get involved."

"Well, you should have anyway! You were clearly having a good time! I could tell!"

"All three of you, shut up!" Akuto yelled, which was very rare for him.

And yet, the apologies continued late into the night.

2 - I Want to Eat Rice Pudding

“Would you please teach me how to have sex?”

Keina suddenly stuck her face in front of Akuto.

They were in his room, on a weekend. And Akuto had just woken up.

He’d heard the sound of his door opening and sat up in bed, just in time for Keina to jump on top of him.

“Huh?”

“I said, will you please teach me how to have sex?” Keina said again.

—*Um...*

Akuto tried to calm himself down.

She didn’t seem to be offering him anything. He knew from Fujiko that when a girl wanted that from you, she made it a little more obvious. Keina’s face was a little too innocent.

“I read about it in this article, ‘How to Get Prettier By Having Sex.’ And since I want to be prettier, I think we should have sex, don’t you?” Keina used her handbook to call up a mana screen with the article on it, and showed it to Akuto.

It was a girl’s fashion magazine. The article she’d been talking about was displayed on the screen.

“If you read it... I think you know what it involves...” Akuto said hesitantly. Keina nodded to indicate that she did.

“I know the theory. But there’s a big difference between theory and practice.”

—*Theory? What theory?*

“H-How much do you know about it?” Akuto had no idea what to say, so he just put his fingers up against the mana screen to page through the article.

—*Yeah, I guess it doesn’t go into much detail...*

It was a magazine for everyday consumers, so it didn't go into a lot of explicit detail. The most it had were manga-style drawings of a man and women naked from the waist up.

"There's a lot of technical vocabulary, it looks like. There's all these words I don't know. I want you to teach me those too, for example. V—"

"Vermeer," Akuto cut her off quickly before she could finish. "He's famous for his painting of the milkmaid."

"That's right. Vermeer. And it did say something about milk, too. I guess it's good for your skin? And the opposite of it is P—"

"Picasso. He was an abstract painter. Very famous."

"I see. You know a lot about it, huh? I can see why everybody said you're an expert when it comes to sex."

—Is that what everybody says?

Akuto almost got depressed, but it was more important to figure out a way to get Keina out of his room.

"Um... Anyway, it's not something you do early in the morning."

"It's not? The article says that you should do it all day if you want to be really pretty."

—What kind of magazine is this?

"N-N-No. You need to get married before you can do that."

"That's strange. It didn't say anything about being married. Actually, it said that if you do it with somebody who's married to someone else, it's more dangerous and thrilling, and will make you even prettier..."

—This is just getting worse by the minute...

"Both people need to consent, or you can't do it."

"Then just tell me how it's done, okay?" Keina brought her face even closer to his.

"Listen, um..." Akuto had completely run out of ideas when he heard a voice from above.

“I heard what you were discussing,” Korone said as she popped her head out from the cabinet up near the ceiling. That was where she slept in Akuto’s room at night.

—And now it’s going to get even worse...

Akuto thought, but before he could stop her, Korone landed on the bed and took a canola flower out from her bag.

“Listen carefully. A flower has two reproductive organs, a pistil and a stamen...”

Korone began her sex ed class with a perfectly serious look on her face, and Keina nodded back, serious as well.

“Oh... And then what?”

“This stamen contains pollen, which is received by the pistil...”

“Gah! Enough already!” Akuto finally got up and began to push Keina and Korone out of the room.

“Oh, darling. How rude of you.”

“I’m not done explaining...”

“Please, just stop. I need to think today, by myself,” Akuto said. It wasn’t just an excuse to get rid of them, it was really how he felt.

“Think by yourself?” Korone asked. Akuto nodded.

“I’m sorry. Can you leave me alone, just for this morning?”

“I’m afraid that, as your observer, I’d like to at least know what you’re thinking about,” Korone said. Akuto thought for a minute before answering.

“About my future. You could say it has to do with whether or not I’ll be able to graduate from the Academy.”

“That’s very serious. I’ll make sure no one enters your room this morning, then,” Korone said.

“While you’re doing that, I’ll talk to Korone about how to have sex, okay? I’ll come back this afternoon and we can do it!” Keina said cheerfully.

“No, you don’t have to do that,” Akuto said, looking exasperated. He turned to Korone and added, “And... please don’t explain to her, if you can avoid it.”

Korone must have heard him, but she didn’t react at all.

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“If you use things like this, you can become healthier,” Korone said. When she hit the button, the stick-like object she was showing to Keina began to vibrate.

Keina took the vibrating object and began to spin it around.

“Ooh! It certainly feels like it could make you healthy, yes!”

Akuto’s room was on the first floor, and there was a grassy lawn outside. That’s where Korone and Keina were sitting. Of course, they were doing their own sex education class.



“Excuse me... What are you doing with that thing? It’s making me uncomfortable,” Fujiko interrupted them.

“There’s no reason to be uncomfortable. It’s simply a massage device.”

“...Yes, I think that’s what the packaging says for most of those things.”

It wasn’t unusual for Korone to be waving around some kind of strange object, so Fujiko simply changed the subject rather than ask any more questions.

“Is Akuto inside?”

“He is, but he asked me not to let anyone in until the afternoon.”

“...Is he still mad?”

“No, he said he had an important decision to make about his future, and he wanted to think. It seems to have something to do with whether or not he’s going to quit school.”

“What?!” Fujiko shouted, before blurting out exactly what came to mind, “Then he’s finally ready to become the Demon King and join forces with me, isn’t he?”

“I don’t know if that’s really the case,” Korone said coldly, but Fujiko wasn’t listening.

“Hahahaha! Victory is mine! Now, it’s time for me to start planning the future!”

“The future?” Keina asked. She seemed confused.

“That’s right. My future with Akuto, of course!”

“I don’t know how far in the future you’re talking about, but darling’s having sex with me this afternoon,” Keina said innocently.

Fujiko froze. Her cheeks were twitching, like she couldn’t believe what she’d just heard.

“Wh-What?”

“I said, he’s going to have sex with me! He’s going to put his seed inside me

and fertilize me!” Keina was smiling. “He’s going to use lots of toys, too! And then I’m going to milk him and drink it, and my skin will get silky smooth!”

“Wh... Wh... What did you say?!” Fujiko screamed, shaking her head frantically. Then she stuck her finger out at Keina and said, “You’re lying! You have to be lying! If you keep on lying like that, I’ll roll you up in a mat and throw you in the Tamazon river, you... you... hussy!”

Keina just gazed at her densely.

“Oh! What’s gotten into you? I’m just telling you my plans for the afternoon!”

“Well, you’re lying about them! If I just go and ask Akuto...”

“You can’t. He said not to let anyone in this morning,” Keina said.

Fujiko looked at her with bloodshot eyes, then she slapped her hands as if she was realizing something. She got a look in her eyes like a murderer who’d found a new target, and whispered to herself.

“That’s right. Which means if I get rid of you during the morning, I don’t need to know what Akuto is thinking, do I?”

“Wh-What?!” Keina realized she was in danger, and stood up and began to back away.

“Be a good girl and let me kill you! For the sake of my future with Akuto!” Fujiko raised up her right hand.

But, a moment before she could do anything, Keina screamed and fired a ball of light. Fujiko hadn’t been expecting an attack, and was blown backwards by the explosion before she could react.

“Kyah!” Fujiko screamed as she flew across the lawn.

But she hadn’t taken much damage; only a part of her clothing had been burnt.

“N-Now you’ve done it!” Fujiko stood up and instantly attacked Keina back in the same way.

Keina just barely managed to dodge the attack, and quickly ran away.

“Nooooo! What’s going on?!”

"I heard some noise on the lawn in front of the boys dorm so I came to check it out but... what happened here?"

Junko arrived shortly after Fujiko began chasing Keina around. The only person left on the lawn was Korone.

"Fujiko Eto and Keina Doronz are battling over Akuto Sai," Korone said.

"I wish I could say that's surprising, but it isn't. Why didn't you just have him stop them?" Junko pointed to Akuto's room.

"No, he instructed me to let no one bother him this morning."

"... He can be such a pain sometimes. What's the problem here?"

"The two of them fought over a simple misunderstanding, but the reason Akuto is staying in his room seems to be that he's considering a decision that may lead to him quitting school."

"Is that true?!" Junko asked. Korone nodded.

"Yes."

"W-Wait a second. What's he worried about?"

"I don't know the details. He didn't tell me," Korone said.

—I see... Maybe I did put too much pressure on him. But he could've at least talked to me... When I think about it, he's been treated in a way that would cause a lot of people to never want to leave their rooms. Should I try to help him?

"What are you mumbling to yourself?" Korone asked. Junko gasped.

"N-No, I wasn't thinking of trying to get on his good side by cheering him up..." When she realized what she was saying, Junko's face went red.

"I see. You're free to do what you like, but you're not getting inside until afternoon," Korone said.

Junko waved her hands.

"No, no, no! I'm not planning anything like that. It's true. W-Well, I can wait

till afternoon... No, I need to stop the fight, first. Haha... hahaha..."

With that, Junko left.

—I need to stop thinking aloud... No, that doesn't matter. I need to stop that fight... I-I know. If I can find out why they're fighting, I can stop it easily. Yes. That's a great idea. But how... I know. I hate to say it, but if I can get that human stealth bomber to help me... I'll be able to sneak past Korone and get into his room easily.

Junko nodded to herself.

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The "human stealth bomber" in question was alone in her room, with a nervous look on her face.

"Hehehehe... This precious meal is mine... and nobody else can have it!"

She was nervous, but grinning. Her red hair was bouncing about happily.

Of course, it was Keena Soga. She was alone in her room, staring at a white gelatin-like meal in an earthenware cup.

"This is the legendary Uonuma Koshihikari rice pudding! There's so little of it made that it's almost impossible to get, and I finally got myself some!"

Rice pudding. There were a lot of recipes, but the simplest was to mix sugar and milk with boiled rice, and then cool it. If you make it that way, it tastes exactly how you'd think it would. It was a fairly popular dish overseas, but here in the Empire, where rice was the staple food, it wasn't very popular.

What Keena was holding was melted rice mixed with coconut milk, which was something similar to an actual dessert, but it still wasn't a very popular dish. She said it was "rare," but that only meant that it was so unpopular that only a few were made.

But no matter how unimportant something is, there's always somebody who loves it. On the rice mailing lists, and rice BBSes, and rice social networks that Keena always frequented, this rice pudding was a legend. The only reason Keena hadn't been at the café from earlier was that she'd been running around trying to find it.

“Rice pudding is all about the mix between the sweetness of the rice and the sweetness of the sugar, you know? But here you’ve got the sweetness of the coconut milk and the sweetness of the fruit, mixing together in perfect harmony! Hehehe... Heheheh... I haven’t even started eating and already I’m drooling!”

Keena picked up her spoon.

“Alright, it’s time...”

Just then, the door to her room swung open.

“Keena! I need something! Can you give me your help with it?” Junko came inside.

“Huh?”

Keena was so focused on her rice pudding that she didn’t hear what Junko had said properly. Or rather, she only heard the last part.

“Keena! I need something! Can you give me... it?”

“...Give me it?”

“Can you give me your rice pudding?”

“Aaah! Noooo!”

She wasn’t handing over that rice pudding. Keena quickly grabbed her cup and bolted for the door where Junko was standing.

“Hey, what are you doing?”

Junko tried to grab her, but Keena stepped forward with her right leg and dropped down low. When her right foot landed on the ground, she spun around in a half turn while keeping low, and slid right past Junko and out the door.

“What...?!” Junko couldn’t believe it.

Junko was proud of how good she was at melee combat, and someone had just gotten right past her.

“Th-That’s the ancient art of shukuchi!”

Shukuchi. A skill that allowed you to step forward and move your body’s

center of gravity past the point where your foot landed, moving you forward several steps in a single moment.

There was no way that Keena could have learned that skill. Her obsession with the rice pudding had caused her body to instinctively select the most suitable way to protect it.

At least, that's what Junko would say later. In any event, she'd gotten past Junko, and was running down the hall.

"Tch!" Junko chased after her. Of course, Junko was faster. But she knew it wouldn't be that easy.

"I knew it...!"

Once Keena could get around a corner, she'd disappear before Junko could find her. Keena's clothes were already scattered down the hallway. If she disappeared there was no way Junko could find her.

"She's gone..." Junko said. "But why did she run?"

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"I should be safe now..."

Keena was hiding in the shadow of the boy's dorm. She was totally naked except for a curtain she'd wrapped around herself. She'd grabbed it from a classroom when she was making her escape.

"Junko won't follow me to the boy's dorm. Now, time to eat that pudding!" she said. "I didn't expect to eat it outside, but I know that rice pudding eaten outside has to be even more delicious..."

Just as she tried to dig her spoon into the white pudding...

BOOOM!

An explosion went off right next to her.

"KEINA!" Fujiko howled angrily. Then she charged at her.

"Huh?! Why?!" Keena started to run.

Fujiko had said "Keina," but Keena thought, of course, that she was referring to her.

“Wh-Why is Fujiko after me too...?” Keena threw aside her curtain as she began to run, clutching the pudding cup in her hands.

“Keina! Where did you go?!” Fujiko looked around for Keina, her face twisted with rage.

“S-She really is looking for me... Oh no! It can’t be...!” Keena looked down at the rice pudding in her hands.

“She must know I have it! I didn’t expect Junko and Fujiko to find out...”

○

“I don’t understand why you’re chasing after me! If you want to join us for afternoon sex, then the three of us can all do it together!”

Keina was jumping around to dodge Fujiko’s attacks, and firing back balls of light when she could.

“The three of us... That might not be so bad... Wait! I can’t do that! Akuto belongs to me and me alone!”

Fujiko was keeping up with her, attacking violently as she followed Keina. By now, Fujiko was totally serious. She wasn’t using the light balls, which were magic she was bad with. Instead she was slowly cornering Keina with the vials of drugs she always carried with her. She hit Keina’s clothes with a marker drug, and then summoned light balls that would automatically track it.

The other students gathered when they heard the commotion.

“What’s going on?”

“Fujiko’s fighting the exchange student?”

“Let’s help her! Fujiko’s such a nice girl! Something really bad must have happened for her to fight”!

“The exchange student must have done something wrong!”

So said the students, as they prepared to join the fight on Fujiko’s side.

“I-It looks like we’re attracting a crowd!” Keina said. She didn’t know what was going on, but Fujiko’s attitude suddenly changed.

“Everyone, stay back! She suddenly attacked me for no reason! And she was

shouting lewd words when she did it, too! She's like a dangerous beast!" Fujiko yelled.

Of course, all the students believed her.

"Get her!"

"How dare she do that to a gentle girl like Fujiko!"

Suddenly, Keina was being followed by an angry mob. Since it was a boring weekend, the other students in the dorm began to participate in the fun.

"Wh-What's going on? I didn't do that! She's lying!" Keina protested, but nobody listened to her. She was like a rabbit being chased by hunting dogs.

"Nooo! Why is this happening?!" Keina kept running.

And then for a moment, she stood still, unsure of which corner to go down...

THUD!

"Hyah!" And something invisible slammed into her and she tripped.

Of course, it was Keena.

But Keina didn't have time to stop and think about it; the mob was after her, and she had to flee quickly!

○

"Oww..." Keena had fallen to the ground as well, but she'd managed to protect her rice pudding. In her rush to protect it, she'd ended up naked on the ground with her legs splayed, but she was invisible, so it didn't matter.

"W-Whew... That was a close one."

Keena stood up to get away from Keina, who was glancing furtively around and trying to figure out what had happened.

But then Fujiko came rushing towards her, with a massive group of students behind her. Of course, they were after Keina, but unfortunately Keena wasn't the type of girl who was perceptive enough to figure that out.

"I-I knew it! All these people are after my rice pudding!" Keena said, absolutely sure of it. "I'll just have to eat it while I run..."

Gulp.

Keena gulped to stop herself from drooling. But then she shook her head.

“No! If I don’t eat it when everything’s just perfect, it would be rude to the craftsmen who made it! So much effort was spent in its creation!”

And so Keena decided to run for real.

“I need to get somewhere where nobody will come... I know! There’s a spot on the roof where it’s locked to keep people out!”

Keena stopped running and started to fly up into the sky.

“Rice pudding on the roof! It’ll be wonderful! Oh, it’s so white and smooth, and just a little sweet, like eating a cloud! Yes, it’s the perfect treat to eat under blue skies! They go together like salmon and grated radish! No, wait! If I start thinking about other foods it will dull my sense of taste! Yes, it goes together like morning dew and ladybugs! I need to get as close to the sky as I can!”

Keena flew upwards, her voice more dazed than ever.

○

“Whew. All they ever do is cause problems.”

Student Council President Lily Shiraishi used a secret key that only she possessed to open up the door to the roof. She’d wanted to go somewhere with a lot of space, where she wouldn’t be bothered. The complaints from the neighbors after the chaos in town had been horrible, and the knights had been on her case, too. She was in a bad mood, so she’d brought a sandbag up to the roof so she could work off some stress.

A lot of the students could use flying magic, but they all followed the rules about going up to the roof. And anyway, the roof had only become off limits recently, after a huge hole had been blown in it during the last war. There were rumors that the high priest of Suhara had died there, and even the students who could fly found the place too creepy to spend any time there.

“Hmm, I was right, this place is empty. I can probably just leave this up here.”

Lily used the same telekinetic power she’d used to bring the sandbag up to the roof to hang it from a pole on the fence. She gave it a few taps to test it,

and then wound up a big swing.

“It’s his fault in the first place for going into town.”

Lily slammed a fist into the sandbag, hard. It started to shake with a creaking sound.

“I don’t know what happened there, but I can guess. Fujiko Eto must’ve done something.”

Thud. Thud.

“And then there’s those damn knights!”

Thud. Thud. Thud!

“They’re trying to blame the whole thing on my students to cover up their own corruption!”

Thud. Thud. Thud. Thud. Thud. Thud!

“It pisses me off! I’m taking calcium pills every day, and it’s still not enough!”

Thudthudthudthudthudthud!

Lily began to tear into the sandbag with incredible force.

That’s when Keena flew up, invisible. She had only heard a portion of what Lily had said.

“She needs more calcium...? Ah! Even the student council president is after my calcium-loaded rice pudding? And she’s hitting that sandbag so hard... She must really want it! But how did the whole school find out about it, I wonder?”

Keena hid in the shadow of the school’s water tower, mumbling to herself.

○

“Over there, Fujiko!” One of the students pointed at the roof.

“That’s where she ran to, huh?” Fujiko ran up the stairs.

The group was following the marker that they thought was attached to Keina’s clothes — but right now, that marker was stuck to Keena’s body. Of course, Fujiko and the other students had no idea.

“The roof? Where we’re not allowed to go?” They realized that the door to

the roof was locked.

“It doesn’t matter. They say it’s off limits because the hole hasn’t been repaired. If she’s hiding up there, it means we’ve got her cornered!”

Encouraged by her words, the students used magic to blast down the door. There was a *BOOM* sound as the door slid across the roof.

“Get her!” Fujiko and her followers all rushed onto the roof. There were 20 of them in all.

“Where are you?!”

“Come out!”

“You can’t escape!”

They began to spread out across the roof, and one of them happened to step on the door that they’d just knocked down. He realized that there was something strange about the way it felt beneath his feet. And then it moved.

“U-Uwah!” he screamed and jumped off.

A shadow appeared from beneath the door — someone had been squished under it when it had been broken down.

“Hey, what the hell are you doing?”

Of course, it was Lily Shiraishi who lifted up the door and stood up. There were blue veins on her forehead, and a glare on her face that would’ve made a hungry, man-eating beast turn and run.

At the Academy, how good you were in a fight meant everything, so as student council president, Lily was one of the best. The whole school knew how scary she was. The students all got a look on their faces like a person gets when the “friend” he thought he was pranking turns out to be a yakuza.

“N-Nothing... We didn’t see you here. We didn’t know you’d be here...”

“What? Are you saying I’m so small you didn’t notice me?”

Lily was being unfair. She was just extremely sensitive about her own height.

“N-No, I didn’t... I’m sorry. I just never notice the little stuff...”

Those were the worst words the student possibly could've chosen.

"A-All of you..."

Lily was angry enough to begin with. Now, she put her hand on the brim of her fancy hat. When she turned it around, it was a sign that she was really pissed.

"You're not leaving here alive!"

The hat was turned around.

In the next moment, 20 people flew into the air at once. Lily's arms multiplied like a statue of Kannon, stretching out and punching each person ten times in an instant.

"If it were night, I would've turned you all into constellations. You're lucky it's daytime."

Just after she said that, the students all landed head first on the ground. And then Lily glared at the last person standing.

"I-I-It was really just a tiny... I mean a minor mistake!" Fujiko tried to say while laughing uncomfortably. Even Fujiko tried to avoid fighting the student council directly.

"Did you just say tiny? Huh?" Lily screamed.

"Heh... heheh... I guess I've got no choice, then. Everyone else is unconscious, so I don't have to hold back!"

Fujiko realized she couldn't escape, so she decided to fight instead. She tossed off her uniform, revealing her leather bondage outfit underneath.

"Cerberus!" she shouted, and a huge beast appeared on the roof in a blast of wind. The Demon Beasts had been in hiding since the war, but this one was a personal favorite of Fujiko's, and she'd kept it.

"You want a fight, huh? Well, you've got it," Lily said.

"I didn't plan on this, but if we're going to fight, I'm going to fight for real! And if I win, I'm taking the student council presidency!"

By now, the two of them seemed to have completely forgotten what they'd

been doing.

Lily faced off with Fujiko, who was now astride Cerberus. Tension began to build between the two. If someone gave a signal, they both would've moved at once.

But instead, someone came through the broken door.

"Fujiko! I heard from Korone and Doronz what happened! What do you think you're doing?!" It was Junko, with Keina trailing behind her.

When Junko was chasing Keina, she'd run across Keina instead, and heard the story from her. All Keina had said, though, was that Fujiko had suddenly attacked her. From Junko's perspective, she had not the slightest idea why Lily and Fujiko were facing off with one another.

"W-What are you doing?" she asked again.

But neither Lily nor Fujiko knew why they were fighting anymore.

"Hmph. We were fighting about what's the best side dish for dinner tonight."

This was Lily's idea of a joke. Fujiko loved being sarcastic, so she joined in.

"The student council president says that whatever it is, she wants as much of it as possible. She says she hopes it will help her chest grow."

"You're a dead woman..." Lily's expression grew even more ferocious. If a child saw it, it would traumatize them for life.

"Both of you, calm down. I'm afraid I'm going to have to put a stop to..." Junko tried to interrupt, but Lily jabbed at her with an extending arm.

Smack!

The fist hit Junko's face and bounced off. It was a weak attack, a message to stay out of this.

But...

"Don't try and stop me. You couldn't beat me in the labyrinth, remember?"

Junko had staggered back and dropped to her knees, but those words lit a fire in her eyes.

“...Take that back, please. I’m not who I once was. I will join in this battle over side dishes!”

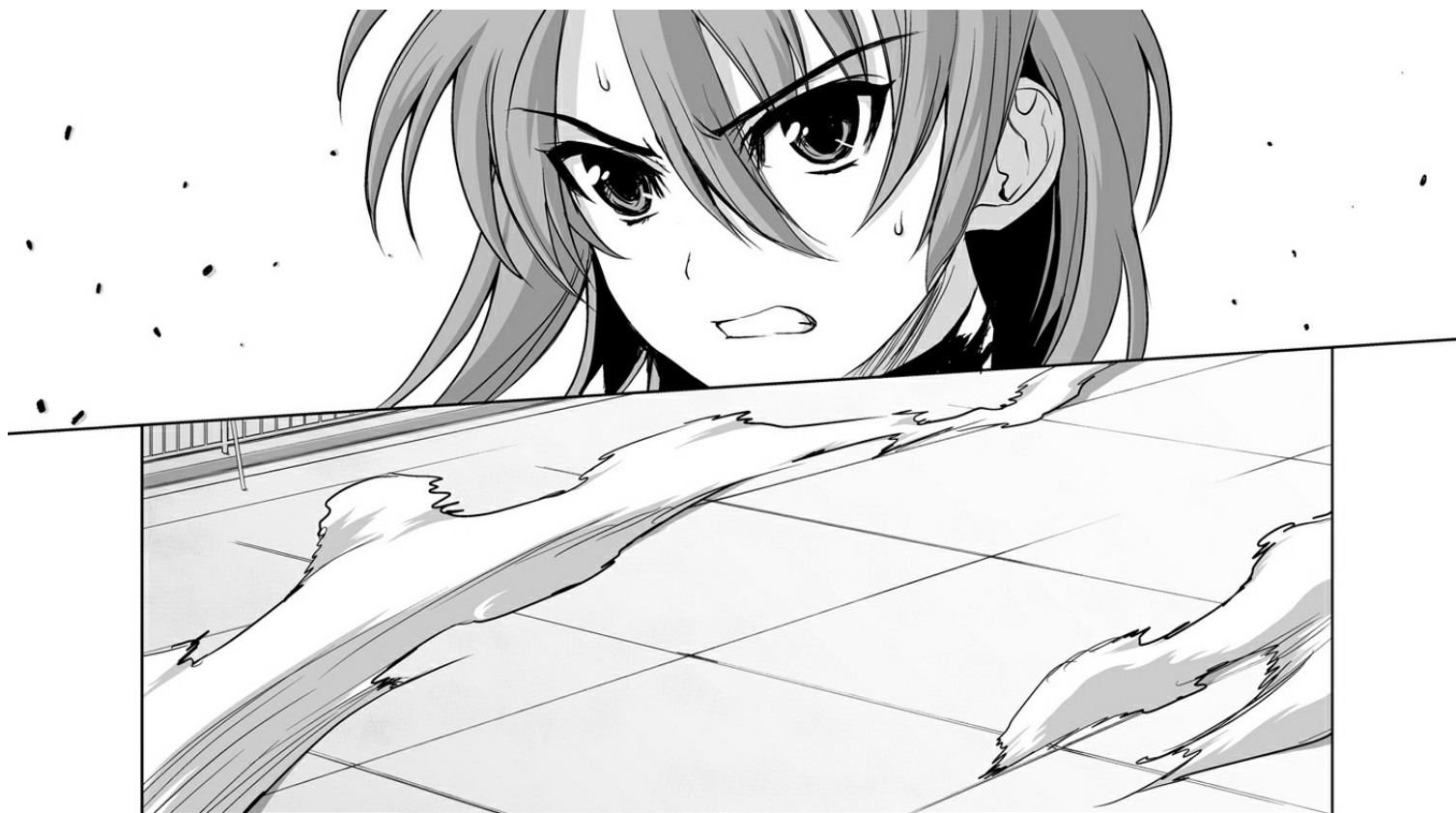
Junko drew the blade at her waist. It was her family’s treasure, the Sohaya no Tsurugi. A blade blessed with incredible powers by the god Suhara. Now that Suhara was dead, its powers had weakened, but it was still an extremely powerful sword. It still had the power to rapidly boost its wielder’s mana.

A rainbow light ran along the blade, covering Junko’s body with mana. The intense pressure radiating from her was enough for Lily to get serious.

“I like it! That face! That power! I’m excited for this now! Both of you, come and get me!”

Wind blew across the concrete hill. The three pretty girls were the only ones standing among the unconscious students. Each of them had their own style of elegance and strength, and each of them was tensed and ready for battle.

It was like a beautiful sight, that is, if you forgot the fact that none of them knew why they were fighting.



“Eeyaaaah!”

It was Lily who made the first move. She wasn't lying when she said she intended to fight them both. Her flurry of punches reached out towards both Fujiko and Junko.

“Dodge!” Fujiko ordered Cerberus, who reacted with bestial speed. The huge, three-headed beast showed no fear in the face of the simultaneous attacks, dodging them perfectly with a series of leaps to the left and right.

Junko created a clone to dodge the attacks. When Lily's punches hit, it disappeared, and Junko was already gone.

“Tch!” Lily looked around for Junko.

“Standard combat theory says she'd jump up... which means she's below?!”

Only someone of Lily's strength would've been able to detect the flow of mana at the last second and dodge. She leapt up slightly to dodge the attack at her feet.

“You dodged it?!” Junko had used her mana to create a false concrete floor to hide under while she charged at Lily, and now that her attack had failed, she was crouched down and wide open.

“Hah!” Lily tried to punch downwards, but before she could, Fujiko took action.

“You're not fighting just one person!” Fujiko's whip struck at Lily. She'd waited for Lily to jump off the ground, but since Lily could fly, it didn't give her the advantage she'd expected. Lily stopped in mid-air and slashed apart the whip with a mana-coated strike.

““Oh no, I failed...!’ Is what I'm NOT going to say! I'm not the type who fights with brute strength!” Fujiko's plan had been for Lily to slash at the whip all along. When she did, she simply let it go. The whip wrapped itself around Lily like it had a will of its own.

“What? It was a trap?” Lily gasped in surprise. The whip squeezed her torso, and she moaned in pain.

“Hahahaha! I never thought I could beat you in a straight-up fight!” Fujiko

laughed as if she'd already won.

"You coward! Don't fight with your tools! Fight me bare-handed!" Lily grunted. She could still reach out her arms, but since she couldn't use her shoulders, she couldn't move them fast enough to turn them into punches. Fujiko's Cerberus hopped around to dodge them.

"Fighting bare-handed is what barbarians do!" she laughed. "Also, when most girls get caught like that, their breasts get wrapped up and squeezed by the whip, and gives anybody seeing it a nice show. But with your skinny body, that doesn't happen. Hahaha!"

"Ugaaah! I'll get you for this!" Lily screamed, while Fujiko just laughed.

But then, the laugh froze on her lips.

"Shameless!"

The whip was sliced apart with a shout. Lily was free. But before Fujiko could even react, there was someone standing on top of one of Cerberus's heads. It was Junko, with her arms crossed and looking down at Fujiko.

"I've been meaning to have a talk with you about that!"

"Yeah, and I've been getting pretty annoyed at your goody-goody act!"

Fujiko tried to go on the attack, but Cerberus staggered and Junko was forced to leap away.

"It doesn't matter, I'm still taking you both down!" Lily started punching randomly in Fujiko and Junko's direction.

"Stop messing around!" Fujiko howled as Cerberus started running.

"If you want a brawl, then you've got one!" Junko created another clone, so she was facing off against Lily and Fujiko at the same time.

Lily turned towards her, ready for a fight, and Fujiko spurred Cerberus onwards to join in the brawl. The battle got fiercer, things got even more confused, and chaos manifested on the roof.

Meanwhile, there were two people watching as the battle unfolded: Keena and Keina.

Keena was watching from the shadows, and she'd gotten a strange idea in her head.

"Oh no! This is all because of my rice pudding! When they talked about side dishes for dinner, this is what they meant! What do I do? My wonderful rice pudding is making my friends fight! It's such a horrible thing that the world can never be at peace!"

Keena was talking like she was the heroine of a tragedy. She'd gotten down on her knees to pray, but the rice pudding cup was still firmly in her hands.

"I-I have no idea why this happened!" Keina, who'd been dragged up to the roof by Junko and then abandoned, was just standing there in shock. But unluckily for her, she found herself caught up in the battle.

"Kyah!"

Fragments of concrete rained down upon her. She put up her hands to defend herself, but a small rock struck her forehead.

"Oww!" She put her hand up to her head. A small amount of blood stuck to her fingers.

"Blood! Noooo! It hurts! Nooo!" When she saw the blood, Keina started to scream. But none of the three who were fighting noticed.

One of Cerberus's fireballs was knocked off course by a punch from Lily, and part of it flew towards Keina.

"Watch out!"

Her body was suddenly knocked to the side. Keena, still invisible, had tackled her and protected her from the spray of flames.

"Kyaaaah!" Keina fell to the ground, shocked. It was only then that the three realized something was wrong.

"Hmm?"

"What?"

"What happened?" When they turned towards Keina, they saw Keena, too.

"Stop!" Keena spread out her arms in the pose of a young girl trying to stop a

war.

“Stop fighting! Please! Please, I’m begging you!” Keena said, weeping. But since the three of them were all women, a young girl’s tears didn’t mean that much to them.

“B-But I’m fighting to right a wrong,” Junko mumbled.

“But Dorry got hurt!” Keena yelled. Junko fell silent, but Fujiko was unimpressed.

“Its her fault this whole thing happened!” Fujiko said.

“I’m not just going to ignore it when someone flattens me with a door,” Lily said. Since she’d been an innocent bystander to begin with, she wasn’t going to forget this easily.

“Stop it! I know why you’re fighting! So...” Keena dropped to her knees and put the cup of rice pudding on the ground in front of her.

“Let’s all share it! That should fix everything!”

The three of them stared at the cup in confusion.

“...What are you talking about?”

“And...”

“What is that?”

“What? This is rice pudding! The legendary rice pudding made from Uonuma Koshihikari rice! It’s strained until it’s silky smooth, and goes perfectly with milk! Its heavenly taste is said to make anyone who eats it feel like they’re floating on a cloud! The legendary Rosanjin spoke of it when he said, ‘My day begins with rice pudding, and my day ends with rice pudding!’ It was ranked #1 in a newspaper survey of foods people want for their last meal!” Keena explained in an awe-struck voice, but the others did nothing but glance at one another.

“Rice... pudding?”

“I’ve never tried it.”

“It’s basically milk porridge. If you don’t flavor it, it tastes like milk and rice, and if you try to make it sweet, it’s not that different from regular pudding,”

Fujiko said flatly.

Lily looked at Fujiko like this was the dumbest thing she'd ever heard.

"Is that what's behind this? Did you blast off the door to the roof to get that stuff?"

"Of course not! It's another one of that girl's stupid misunderstandings!"

"I'm sure it is, but... Ugh. This whole thing is starting to feel so stupid." Junko sighed and put her blade back in its scabbard.

"I guess we can do this another time." Lily's shoulders slumped.

"Yes, I agree. You can go back home, Cerberus." Fujiko sent Cerberus back to his den, and put on her uniform.

"I'm so glad you all understand! Now let's all eat it, together!" Keena started to cut the rice pudding into five equal pieces, but the three of them just walked past her.

"See you later."

"You can have it all to yourself."

"If I really want some, I can just use the student council budget to buy it."

Keena couldn't believe what she'd heard.

"Huh? Then I can have it all to myself? Oh, but you want some, right Dorry?"

Keena looked towards Keina, who'd been crying a moment ago. She was looking at the rice pudding with gleaming eyes. Keina could be almost idiotically pure-hearted at times, and she'd evidently believed everything Keena had said.

"Y-You're willing to give me something so wonderful? You're really sure?"

"Yup! Let's eat it together!"

Keena and Keina nodded to one another.

And then someone else appeared on the roof.

"Huh? I heard there was a fuss, so I came up here. Is everything alright?"

Akuto poked his head out from the broken doorway. Junko, Fujiko, and Lily were just about to leave, and all of them were shocked.

“Oh.”

“Akuto!”

“What are you doing here?”

Lily had nothing to do with it, but Fujiko and Junko remembered the original reason for their quarrel.

“H-Hey! I heard you’re worried about your future! Why didn’t you come talk to me?”

“Akuto! You’ve decided on a happy future with me, haven’t you?”

Junko and Fujiko rushed towards him.

Akuto was confused, but apologized.

“Huh? If I gave you the wrong idea, I’m sorry. I wanted to think about something on my own. That was all.”

“Think about something? I heard it was something important, that had to do with your future.”

“No... I mean... I feel really bad for the owner of that café. His café might go out of business and he might lose his job because of me. So I thought I should send him some money.”

“But you don’t have a lot of cash yourself, do you? That would be pretty expensive...”

“That’s right. So I was thinking of asking the principal for a loan that I would pay back when I graduate. I just wouldn’t feel right if I didn’t. So I was trying to think about it and come up with a plan to repay the debt.”

“No! I can’t let you get a job, Akuto!” Fujiko said as she clung to him. “If it’s that important to you, I’ll pay it! Whether it’s a hundred million, or two hundred million!”

Junko interrupted her loudly, as if she didn’t want to lose her chance.

“I-If that’s what this is about, then I’m at fault too. My family will pay the money...”

But Akuto shook his head.

“No, I thought about it, and we’re students, so we’d be relying on our parents’ money. But this time, I don’t want to use any money that’s coming from somebody’s family. I think part of what happened last time was because I tried to rely on the Hattori clan, for one thing.”

“Th-Then...”

“Unless I make the money myself, or somehow get lucky and find it, there’s going to be some political meaning behind it, right? So I have to do this myself,” Akuto said, but neither Fujiko nor Junko were willing to give in.

“If you want money, I can go collect some in secret!”

“I don’t think anybody will want money that you got illegally, Fujiko.”

“What? It’s better than having your parents pay!”

“Fine, but if you’re paying, that means you’re admitting you’re at fault for what happened at the café, right?”

“Of course not! That was Keina Doronz’s fault! This whole fight started because of her ridiculous attitu...”

“That’s right! I heard you were being mean to Doronz, so I came to stop you...”

The two of them went back to being ready to fight at any moment.

Akuto frowned. He looked at Lily, the most powerful person here, for help, but she just shook her head like she didn’t want to be bothered with it, and then walked off.

Junko and Fujiko started screaming at each other, only to be interrupted by Keena, who was naked except for a school uniform jacket.

“No fighting! If we all eat the rice pudding together, it will solve everything! We’ll all be friends!” Keena said.

Fujiko and Junko tried to ignore her, but then they noticed that Keina was eating the rice pudding she’d been given.

“Oh, this is delicious! I didn’t realize there was a way to make rice taste as good as bread! This is wonderful! We can be friends!” Keina said. She seemed

to have forgotten all about the sex she was supposed to have with Akuto.

Come to think of it, the jacket Keena was wearing belonged to Keina. That could only mean they were friendly enough now for her to lend it.



“See, we’re friends! It’s delicious,” Keena said, “so try some!”

She stuck a cup and spoon in Junko and Fujiko’s faces, and they each took a bite. They both frowned.

“I hate to say it, but... it’s not great.”

“No. It tastes awful.”

“Huh? It’s delicious! Right? Right?” Keena offered the last bit in the cup to Akuto.

He thought for a moment before eating it, and then shook his head.

“I’m sorry, but it tastes very... mysterious. Huh?” Akuto saw letters at the bottom of the cup. “You’re a winner?”

That’s what it said on the bottom of the cup.

“Oh! Yay! I won!” Keena shouted with glee.

“One of the reasons this rice pudding is so popular is that sometimes you can win a prize. It’s really hard to win, but you get a ton of money.”

“Money?”

“Yup. It keeps building up if nobody wins, so I think right now it’s about 50 million,” Keena said, as if that wasn’t an incredibly huge number.

As everyone stood there in shock, Keena handed the cup to Akuto.

“You said it was okay if it was money you found because you were lucky, right? Congratulations. You were the last one to eat it, so it’s yours, Ackie.”

Akuto just stood there in shock. But Keena was perfectly calm.

“See? Rice pudding made everything peaceful, right? So let’s all eat rice pudding!”

○

Later, the other students heard about what had happened, and rice pudding became extremely popular.

But nobody was able to eat rice pudding every day, and so Keena and Keina became popular for being the only students in the Academy who could do it.

Huge amounts of rice pudding were brought into the school for them to eat, but nobody won, and the fad quickly faded.

“It’s supposed to be legendary because it’s impossible to find, but...”

Akuto was able to send a letter, along with the winning cup, to the owner of Café Bakhtin. This probably wasn’t a nice thing to say after he’d been so blessed by it, but...

“...It’s impossible to find because nobody wants to eat it, and the prize money only built up so much because nobody bought a winning cup, right?”

3 - Literature is Hard?

Keena and Keina were much closer now, it seemed. It was hard to tell if it was because of the rice pudding or not.

This made things a lot easier for Akuto, now that he didn't have Keina following him around every minute of the day. Things were still just as chaotic, though.

"Dorry, this is a book of things that really happened in the past!"

"I see! I'm sure I'll learn a lot from it!"

Keena's hobby lately was finding books for Keina to read, and Keina would always believe whatever was in them.

—*What's she making her read now?*

Akuto glanced at the title; it was an old fiction novel about psychics. It was the story of how an evil mind invaded from space, and humanity fought back with a network of superpowered psychics.

—*It's definitely not non-fiction.*

But Keina really seemed to believe whatever was written in it. In this case, Keena believed it too, so the effect was doubled.

"The Earth is under attack, isn't it?"

"That's right! If you don't have a pure heart, you'll be possessed and terrible things will happen."

Keena and Keina were nodding to each other.

All Keina's talk about 'eco-friendly cafés' was because of a magazine article she'd read just before she'd transferred here. From what Keina had said when she was drunk, after she was found, they'd decided to educate her by giving her magazines.

A lot of the things that had been happening lately were because Keina

believed everything she read. When she'd read a detective novel, she'd started investigating everyone around her, and ended up finding a hidden treasure one of the teachers was keeping. That had caused a mess.

—*Well, I guess superheroes can't cause that much trouble.*

"From the way the possessed people are described in this book, I think Ms. Mitsuko is possessed by evil! She must be purged!"

Actually, it could cause a lot of trouble.

"The stuff in that book isn't real," Akuto interrupted the conversation.

"What?!" Keina's eyes went wide, like she was truly shocked.

"Don't say that, Ackie. You need to read everything in a book as if it were true," Keena said scoldingly.

"Fiction wouldn't exist then, though." Akuto laughed. But Keena shook her head.

"That's not what I meant. A book creates its own world within it. So it's bad manners to take what you know about the real world into a book. It's very stupid to try and take lessons from everything you read, or make it useful to you in the real world, and it's just as dumb to say that a book is stupid because it works differently than the real world. Got it?"

She had the relaxed tone of a village idiot, but what she was saying was fairly complex.

—*Come to think of it, Keena can't do magic, but her grades in the other classes are pretty good.*

Akuto nodded, impressed.

"I see. If that's what you meant, then I'm sorry. But if that's true, then Doronz needs to be careful not to emulate the book here in class."

"Don't worry, she'll figure it out. Dorry is a good girl. If you teach her not to trust what she reads first, she'll never read any books at all." Keena smiled innocently.

"Anyway, you two sure love books," Akuto said. The two nodded, and Keina

noded especially firmly.

“Stories are really neat.”

These days, most books were digitized. Even with just the network accessible from the student notebook, you could access an incredible amount of books. But that didn’t mean there were more readers now.

Since there was so much of it, not many people wanted to access the data of the past. Fiction novels, especially, were something that you didn’t need to survive. For that reason, there wasn’t a lot of point in going back into the past for them, unlike academic papers.

People would often read the latest novels for the same reason they’d go to a concert by a popular band. Since everybody was reading them, you needed to read them too to keep up with the conversation and feel like you were part of the group. But novels and movies weren’t good for much more than that.

Akuto, however, wasn’t bothered by this. He was the type who didn’t really need books. To him, novels were just a thing that sometimes showed up in the bibliographies of non-fiction books. But Keena’s explanation interested him as an analysis of what was happening right now.

“Maybe people who think the gods are real are doing the same thing as people who try to learn lessons from novels,” Akuto said. Keena nodded, but Keina seemed confused.

Then a voice interrupted them.

“I’m sorry to interrupt what sounds like a very strange conversation, but it’s time for our next class. It’s practicals again. This time it’s groups of three, so you’ll be pairing up with me and Keina Doronz.”

The speaker was Junko.

○

Now that she knew that Keina could control Akuto’s power, Junko wasn’t as nervous about the practicals as she’d been before. She didn’t have to worry about Akuto going out of control.

“Today we’re practicing in groups of three. We’ll be using drugs to affect

living creatures,” Miss Mitsuko said.

They’d all moved to the practice room for the class. All the students were standing in groups of three, and in front of each group was a case with a frog, and several vials of medicine.

“First you’ll make the drug, then use magic to change it, and then administer it to the frog. Then, you’ll see if there’s any effect. We’re in groups of three today because we don’t have enough frogs for every individual, so please take turns. The drugs will change the color of the frog’s skin. Your job is to see if you can change the frog’s skin to the color of your choice,” she explained.

But Junko’s face was frozen with fear. Even at a glance, you could tell she was nervous.

“What’s wrong?” Akuto whispered, worried. She shouldn’t have been worried about him going out of control this time.

“N-No, it’s fine. It’s nothing at all. Just don’t mess it up, okay?” Junko said in a shaking voice.

Actually, Junko was afraid of frogs. Akuto had heard this once, but he’d forgotten it.

“Imagine a color and then transfer its pattern into the drug. I think I can do this without causing any problems,” Akuto said.

“Don’t worry! I’ll make it so you don’t mess up!” Keina said confidently.

“P-Please. Please make sure he doesn’t. Really, please.” Junko nodded, shivering.

“I’m a little worried, though, so I think Hattori should go first,” Akuto said.

Junko was barely listening, but a moment later she finally seemed to hear what Akuto had said.

“Y-You’re right. Yes. It’s a simple spell. Just watch.”

Junko picked up the drug and cast a spell on it. The actual transfer of the image she had in her mind was handled by a program, but unless that image was bright and clear, the color wouldn’t come out right. It was something you needed to practice until you got the knack for it.

Once the spell was cast, she went to hand the drug to Akuto.

“O-Okay, it’s done.”

“W-Wait. If I touch it, it might mix up the image imprinted on it, right?” Akuto stepped back to avoid touching the vial.

“N-No, just try not to imagine anything.”

“It doesn’t work that way. And this is a practice class, so you need to do it yourself.”

Akuto was a very serious, and completely uncompromising person. Any other person would’ve picked up that Junko didn’t want to touch the frog, but taking the hint wasn’t something Akuto was good at. And to make matters worse, Junko’s stubbornness meant there was no way she’d admit that she didn’t want to get anywhere near that frog.

“Y-You’re right. I know that. Of course I do.” Junko froze.

“What’s wrong? Hurry up!” Keina said. She was such a naive girl that she didn’t realize what was going on at all. She’d looked around and seen all the other teams change the colors of their frogs’ skin, and couldn’t wait to see it happen with her own group.

“Yeah. I know. I know. Okay, here I go. Here I go!” Junko put her hand on the lid of the case. “I’m taking the lid off!”

“You don’t need to give us a play-by-play, okay?” Keina said, but Junko was too distracted to listen.

“Once I open the case, I’ll pour the drug onto the frog, and then it will be absorbed throughout its body.”

She poured the drug in with trembling fingers. But her hand was far above the frog; it was 30 centimeters above the case. The frog was less than 10cm in size, so of course, she missed.

You might’ve thought that Akuto would’ve figured out that Junko didn’t like frogs by now, but...

“It’s such a simple exercise that she’s deliberately trying to make it difficult for herself,” he said to himself, and completely convinced himself of his own

explanation.

That wasn't the case for Keina, however.

"Just do it quick! Like this!"

Keina grabbed Junko's hand and pushed it towards the frog. The case shook, and the startled frog did a cute little hop. And then, it grabbed onto Junko's fingers where she was holding the vial.

"Nooooo!" Junko leapt up and screamed. She dropped the vial into the case and flung her hand around wildly, but the frog wouldn't come off.

"N-N-NOOOO!" Junko lifted her hand up into the air and flailed it around.

"Oh, I see. Hattori doesn't like frogs..."

Akuto finally realized what was going on here. Once he'd finally picked up on it, he acted fast. He grabbed her arm and tried to remove the amphibian. But, even after he started to hold her arm, she wouldn't stay put.

When she finally did come to a stop, though, the frog took this chance to jump away from her finger, and into the sky.

And what goes up must come down, of course.

The frog landed on her neck and slid inside her shirt, leaving a slimy trail behind it.

"Aaah! Aaaah! It's so slimy!" Junko began to twist her body back and forth violently. Akuto grabbed her and held her down.

"Calm down. It's not a dangerous frog."

"Th-That's not the problem... Aaah! I-It's coming inside!" Junko began struggle in Akuto's arms, her face turning red.

"H-Hey, stay still."

Akuto couldn't grab her tightly, or he might squish the frog. And he couldn't pat her down to try and figure out where it was.

"Where's the frog?"

"M-My back! My back...!"

As she fidgeted, Junko turned her body so that he could see her back. He could just make out a green outline under her shirt.

“I can’t put my hand in there... I know. I can use that motion I practiced last time in this class...” Akuto looked towards Keina. She nodded as if she understood what he meant.

“Leave it to me! That precision motion we practiced last time, right?”

Last time, Keina had controlled Akuto’s mana, enabling him to pile up blocks the size of grains of sand. If they did it again, they could easily remove the frog from Junko’s shirt.

Keina touched Akuto’s hand.

“I’ll start controlling your mana...!” she said, and Akuto began to go to work.

But this task involved both of them. If they were trying to do different things, there was no way it could work. And, in this case, Keina had completely misunderstood him. And Akuto couldn’t stop her.

“This’ll fix it!” Keina shouted, and in an instant, all of Junko’s clothes flew up into the air.

It was an amazing display of undressing, almost like a magic trick. Buttons and hooks were undone without damaging the clothes, zippers were lowered, and even the waistband of the underwear was stretched out, enabling it to fall freely to the floor.

“Aaah! Aaaaah!” Junko screamed again, though this scream was for an entirely different reason.



Her classmates began to murmur among themselves as her naked body was put on full display.

“Why now, in the middle of an ordinary class?”

“Cause he’s the Demon King! He’ll take your clothes for no reason at all!”

Akuto quickly took off his jacket to help shield her from the boys’ curious eyes.

“Aah, W-Wait...”

When Akuto tried to put the jacket on her, it got caught on one of the unused vials on the table.

“Aaah!” Junko had dropped below the table to conceal herself, so the bottle rolled loudly across the table before falling right on top of Junko’s head.

“Oops...”

“Aaah!” Junko screamed a little as the cold liquid splashed on her.

But the real shock came a moment later.

Akuto had already put his magic into the drug. Junko’s white skin began to turn gold.

“It’s a gold dust show!”

The student were whispering to themselves. And not just the boys, but the girls, too.

“It’s some kind of kinky exhibitionism thing!”

“It’s so evil, it’s honestly kind of impressive...”

“Is this some new way for him to get his kicks?”

Everyone was staring at the golden Junko as they whispered.

“H-How humiliating...” Junko wrapped her arms around her body and wept.

Akuto finally succeeded in putting his jacket on her, but all that did was make her mad.

“Y-You dummy!”

Junko slammed a golden punch into his stomach.

○

“But why am I being punished, too? This isn’t fair...” Junko sighed.

“I’m sorry. I’ll do most of the work,” Akuto said, as apologetic as possible.

“But taking off her clothes was the best way to get rid of the frog!” Keina laughed.

The three of them were heading for the old library. They’d been ordered to clean it and organize the books as punishment for the trouble they’d caused in class.

The old library held books made from paper. Books written before the advent of digitization were stored here to be turned into data. Once the process was complete, instead of being destroyed, they were kept here where they were forbidden from the public. They numbered 20,000, not counting the smaller pamphlets and other items.

“Some of the books there are pretty recent, right? I heard that’s what we’ll be working on,” Junko said, trying to change the subject. Keina recited the documents she’d read from memory.

“There are still a few people who like owning physical books. And a few of the books they own are sent here. Some are digitized, and some aren’t. In most cases, if they aren’t it’s because the author refused to give permission for them to be digitalized. For this reason, most paper books made in recent years aren’t converted to digital, so they’re just piled up here.”

“And that’s why they need to be cleaned and organized?”

“Correct. Right now, we’re librarians.” Keina seemed happy. She was probably really excited to get to touch a physical book.

“I’ve heard that people who like books end up obsessing over paper books,” Akuto muttered, and Keina nodded happily.

“That’s right! I’ve never touched a real one, but it still feels really exciting to me! Like it’s a real real thing!”

“A real real thing, huh?”

“The only person I know who cares about real books these days is Fujiko Eto, but it’s true that something you can actually touch does feel more real. What we’re reading is just letters, though, so in either case it’s the same information.”

—The information we take in can never take physical form. But can the information the gods possessed be rebuilt into a real person?

The thought suddenly crossed Akuto’s mind. He remembered what Boichiro had said during the war. As long as you had the Law of Identity, information could take physical form.

—What kind of world is it that we really live in? I guess it’s something you’ll never be able to tell from the inside.

And what was more, the Law of Identity was evidently Keena. Or, more precisely, some kind of will or mind that would suddenly awaken within her.

“Why is it that we’re reluctant to trust digital information? Is originality all that matters to us?” Akuto said to himself, but Junko looked confused.

“Sometimes I don’t understand what you’re saying. No, I guess ‘often’ is a better word.”

But Keina picked up on a word he’d said.

“That’s right! Originality! That’s what I want! Even if I don’t have any memories, if I read a ton of books, I can eventually become me!”

Keina laughed innocently, but when Akuto heard her say it, for some reason he felt something akin to sadness.

○

At the same time, Fujiko had been summoned by Korone.

“It’s not often the two of us are together,” Fujiko said. She had snuck them into a classroom where students never came, since apparently Korone had wanted to be alone.

“Correct. If I attempt to be involved with you, I’m likely to discover all kinds of terrible secrets. I decided that I’d rather not increase my workload,” Korone said flatly.

Of course, Fujiko didn't look happy.

"You're on the government's side, of course. But you didn't call me out here just to provoke me? Something big must be happening if you're not watching Akuto when he's acting irregularly."

"Yes. I would like to propose an exchange of information."

"Regarding Keina Doronz, yes?"

Korone nodded.

"Indeed. You were playing around during that date, but I'm sure you collected a sizable amount of information."

"Of course. But I'm afraid that I didn't learn much of anything."

"Nor did I. And so I'd like to attempt the one method that is impossible unless we work together."

"In other words, what you want is the information the Black Mages have. The non-official logs of humanity's actions."

"Yes. I will use it to enhance the precision of my own information."

"You're trying to cross-reference the logs of every citizen in the empire and see what changed after the war, aren't you? That's a pretty ambitious project." Fujiko grinned.

"Correct. If you're already aware of my plans, we can skip the explanation," Korone said.

After the war, any memories that were inconvenient to Akuto had disappeared from someone's minds. Someone had erased them. If Keina Doronz's appearance was somehow involved...

"I'll be happy to help, if there's something in it for me," Fujiko said, still grinning.

"I thought you'd say that. Here." Korone offered her a bag of ningyo-yaki.

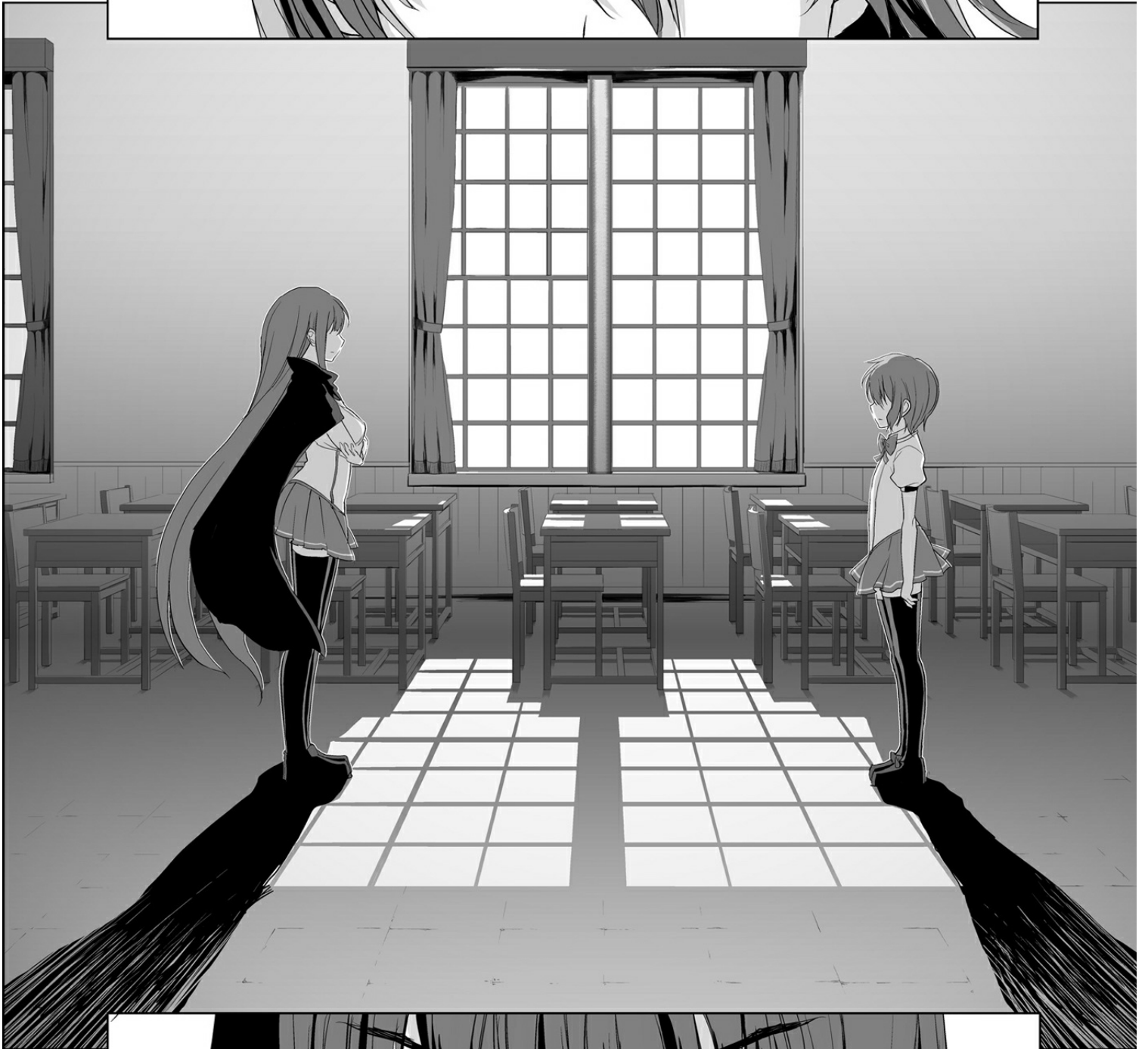
"I don't want that!" Fujiko tried to knock it away, but Korone deftly dodged her hand.

"Well, I knew you'd say that. What I'm really offering you is immunity for the

crimes you committed when you cultivated Akuto Sai's cells."

Fujiko's eyes went wide.

"I see. You're the only one who could use the government to go after me. Now that the logs have all been altered after the war, that is."



She thought a little, and nodded. “I understand. Very well. I’ll give you limited access permissions for the data you seek.”

Fujiko opened up her student notebook and called up an address and password on a mana screen. The Black Mages still hadn’t completely unlocked their own magic. They’d nibbled out their own areas of control in the gods’ memories, and saved their life logs there. They exchanged the passwords to them with primitive codes.

Korone’s eyes began to flash.

“I’ve analyzed the information. I’ll add in the data possessed by the Black Mages to the calculations I’ve done so far. This will improve my precision from 90% to 97%,” Korone said. The glow faded from her eyes, and then she nodded. “I’ve done it.”

“What did you find?”

“Until now, it’s only been a hypothesis, but now it’s almost certain. Keina Doronz is a human created from a data warp by the Law of Identity.”

○

“Wow!” Keina’s eyes gleamed as she craned her head left and right.

The huge building was filled with bookshelves far bigger than a man, spaced out evenly in rows like a futuristic city from an old sci-fi movie.

“I’m afraid we’ll be doing our work over there,” Junko said as she pointed towards a counter at the entrance. There were piles of randomly stacked books, at least a few hundred of them. There was a wheeled cart next to them, which had books on it as well. Someone had brought it over and left it there.

“The poor books...” Keina went over to the cart and picked up the books that had fallen off its side and placed them on the counter.

“It’s a little hard for me to understand why you’d feel that way, but it’s not good to mistreat your possessions,” Akuto said, and he started to help Keina.

But Keina didn’t seem to like what Akuto had said.

“You don’t understand why I’d feel bad for the books?”

“No, I mean books aren’t special. You have to take good care of your tools, of course.”

“That’s not right! Books are special...” Keina flailed her arms in passionate disagreement, but she couldn’t think of what to say next.

“I can understand why book lovers might think that. I’m sorry. I’m just not like that. Maybe I just don’t like the idea of getting too obsessed with a story. It feels too much like the way people get obsessed with belief in the gods, when they’re just a system.”

Keina puffed out her cheeks.

“Don’t try to make this difficult! Fine! If you don’t like books, then fine!”

“I’m sorry. I’ll try my best to like them.”

Akuto picked up one of the books. The only books printed these days had elaborate covers and bindings. The one he’d carelessly picked up was well-made, with a dyed red leather cover. He flipped through it, and the sound of the paper echoed throughout the room.

—This feels pretty good, actually. Doronz probably became obsessed with books before even knowing what this felt like, though.

Suddenly, someone bopped him on the head from behind.

“No reading when you should be organizing. You should know better.” Junko was holding the book she’d whacked him with right in front of her.

“Right. We’d never get done.” Akuto chuckled. He looked over at Keina, who was already absorbed in a large tome she’d opened and put in her lap.

“Let’s just leave her.” Akuto grinned at Junko. Junko shrugged her shoulders in an exaggerated way and grinned back.

“You’d better do a lot of work.”

“I know.”

Akuto went around the counter and checked the scanner. The manual on the screen said that it could scan the insides of a book placed on it and automatically digitize them.

“So we put them through the scanner one at a time so they can be ready, huh?”

“The digital versions will display organizer codes, which will tell us which bookshelves they go on. It’s a simple job. The heavy labor is moving things to the shelves, though.” Junko smiled at Akuto.

“I’ll do that part.” Akuto went out from behind the counter and switched places with Junko.

○

“A human created from a data warp by the Law of Identity?”

“Correct. It’s unbelievable, but the Law of Identity has the power to do it.”

Fujiko and Korone were headed for the old library.

“Then the Law of Identity can give birth to a new world?”

“Probably, yes. But it doesn’t seem to have the power to change everything about our own.”

“So we’re in an extremely unstable position, then.”

“There’s no need to be so pessimistic. Humans have consciousness and free will. In this world, unless you physically take their life, you cannot erase someone’s existence.”

“Then what meaning is there in the existence of a human being created from a data warp by the Law of Identity? What problem occurs if she exists?”

“She was probably created to fix the data warp. Her existence itself isn’t a problem.”

“Then why did you say we need to hurry to the old library?”

“Because there’s a possibility a data alteration will take place, in order to truly fix the warp.”

“And how will that be done?”

“By completing ‘a story that could have existed’ in virtual phase space.”

Fujiko’s mouth fell open.

“What? What does that mean?”

“The world was changed in order to conceal the actions of Akuto Sai. The data warp that was created when that happened has taken human form. In other words, when she is satisfied, the warp will disappear.”

“When Keina Doronz is satisfied?”

“It seems I don’t have time to explain.” Korone looked off into the distance.

“What’s wrong?”

“I’m detecting a mana fluctuation. The Law of Identity will shortly make contact with the data warp, and attempt to repair it. I’m going on ahead.” Korone drew a teleportation circle in mid-air, and then leapt inside it.

“W-Wait!” Fujiko stretched out a hand, but Korone had already gone inside, saying “Catch up later, please. I don’t think you’ll be able to affect the outcome, however.”

“Th-That’s so irresponsible...” Fujiko said, but the teleportation circle had already disappeared.

○

“Working hard, Ackie?” Keena floated into the old library. She had a relaxed look on her face that made you sleepy just looking at it.

“Also...”

Akuto was standing on top of a high ladder holding several books, putting them onto different shelves.

“...do you need my help?” Keena asked, but Akuto shook his head.

“I’m fine. Keep an eye on Doronz for me, please. She’s been reading a book the whole time, so she’s probably okay, but we can’t watch her.”

“Okay!” Keena flew over to Keina.

Meanwhile, Akuto went back to his work. He focused on shelving for a while, but when he heard Keena’s voice, he turned around. She had said something strange.

“Hey, did you decide what story you like?” Keena was whispering to Keina.

Akuto shouldn't have been close enough to hear her, but somehow he heard her anyway.

Keina was sitting on top of a pile of books, with a green-colored book on her lap. Keina had a hand on her shoulder.

"Ke—" Akuto went to call her name.

But then Keina's lips moved as she said something. Her body began to glow brightly, turning his whole field of vision white.

"Huh...?" Akuto was sinking in a world of white. He thought he heard Junko's scream, and Korone's emotionless voice.

"Wh-What is this...?"

"It seems I made it in time. In time to be caught up in it, at least..."

And then Akuto blacked out.

○

When Akuto woke up, he was wearing a fancy frock coat.

"Hmm?" He wondered for a moment if Fujiko had dressed him in it, but then he rejected the idea.

Akuto was in a western-style bedroom. There was a vintage-style mirror and a bed with a canopy. His feet were sunk into a thick carpet.

"What's going on here?"

He looked around. The room was big, but he was the only one standing there. But someone was sleeping in the bed. It was Keina.

"She was reading a book, I thought... I guess I'll wake her up."

As he moved towards the bed, he suddenly froze in shock.

Keina was completely naked. The only thing covering her body was a thin sheet. He could easily make out her body's curves.

"Is this... an illusion?" he whispered. There was a knock as the door opened.

"Excuse me. I'm sorry to interrupt, but this isn't an illusion."

Korone came inside. She was dressed as a maid.

“Korone... Why are you dressed like that? It feels like you know what’s going on...” Akuto said. Korone nodded.

“I’ll explain everything...”

Korone told him that Keina was a human being created from a warp by the Law of Identity, and that she existed in order to correct that warp.

“And she brought us here to do that?”

“This is virtual phase space. We use this space for our teleportation all the time, but right now it’s in a slightly unusual state.”

“Unusual how, exactly?”

“We’re locked in here and unable to escape. In addition, the space’s design comes from the book that Keina Doronz was reading.”

“The book she was reading?” Akuto looked around again. It felt like he was in a noble’s mansion in Europe.

“It’s a work of literature, detailing the loves of European nobles in the 1900s. It was written as a work of entertainment, but it became popular in later years, and was elevated to the status of literature.”

“I see. So basically, we’re locked in the world of a story?”

“Correct. And this fact is intimately linked with Keina Doronz.”

“What do you mean?”

“She, herself, is the warp in the world. When she disappears the world will stabilize, and we’ll be released from virtual phase space.”

“W-Wait... Does that mean that she’s... that Doronz is going to die?”

Akuto looked at the sleeping Doronz. She looked very happy as she slept. He had never seen such a satisfied look on the face of a person who was sleeping.

“Yes, in a sense. All that will really happen, though, is that the rift will disappear,” Korone said flatly.

“You’re not going to tell me to kill her, are you?” Akuto asked, worried.

“I won’t tell you to kill her. I will tell you, however, to erase her. But she will

eventually disappear on her own. That is her role, and why she was created.” Korone nodded.

—*She was created to disappear?*

Akuto didn’t know what to think. That meant that Keina was born just to help him, and would disappear for the same reason.

“I don’t know how I feel about that...”

“Don’t worry. Once she disappears, she will be adequately rewarded.”

“I’m not sure I understand...”

Korone paused for a second before she spoke.

“The warp is composed of people’s memories. Once the memories, in other words, she herself, are satisfied, she will disappear.”

—*She’s made from people’s memories? And what does it mean to be “satisfied?”*

Akuto felt he’d caught a glimpse of the truth of the world that Boichiro had told him about. There were things in this world that just didn’t fit right when you examined them closely. And there was probably another world, in the truest sense of the word, on the outside, that was tightly linked to this one’s destruction.

“The Law of Identity is adjusting this world to keep it running?”

“Very sharp. But this doesn’t necessarily imply that the world isn’t real. We are here, and we’re alive.”

“But you said she’s human, too...” Akuto looked at Keina again.

“Correct. But you can also say this: in this world, humans are supported by the memories of others. No, it’s too early to leap to conclusions. If nothing else, none of us in this world can prove that you exist only in our memories. Which means that the only natural conclusion is that you are a physical being.”

Korone was a Liradan, an artificial being, so she was capable of reaching such a terrifying hypothesis without being perturbed. But Akuto wasn’t. He shivered a little.

“That’s scary. But we are alive, and we were born. So I guess it means we just have to treasure that.”

“Yes. What makes Keina Doronz different is that she was born all of a sudden. Don’t forget that. The above conclusions were drawn from a vast amount of calculations. I can be fairly confident they’re true.”

Akuto let out a quick exhale of breath before he asked his next question.

“So what does it mean for her to be satisfied?”

“I’m afraid that’s a matter of human emotions, and beyond my knowledge. However, emotions can be predicted by patterns. If memories can be measured from feelings, then memories are a story. And the story must be completed, in a way that she finds to her liking,” Korone said.

—*In other words...*

“I see. So we just have to act out our roles in the novel. I’m not a great actor, but I guess I can try.”

Korone nodded.

“Correct. But what’s important is Keina Doronz’s satisfaction, not that the story be played out exactly. However, it’s a safe assumption that anything that did not exist in the original text will not exist in this space.”

“The rules are simple, huh?”

“It won’t be that much of a problem. The story itself is a peaceful one. No one dies. I think you’ll enjoy playing out your role.”

“Glad to hear it.” Akuto felt a little better. But Korone’s next words turned him pale.

“You’re going to have fun. It’s a story of the loves of European nobles. So you’ll be having relationships with a variety of women, before finally ending up with the Count’s daughter.” Korone pointed to Keina.

“What...? I’m supposed to be a European noble?”

○

(Oh, jeez! I’m late!) A voice came from above Akuto’s head.

“Huh? What? What?” He looked around, but nobody was there. He could tell that the voice was Fujiko’s, but nothing else.

“Fujiko? Where are you?”

“Oh, every novel has descriptive text that serves as the author’s point of view. Fujiko Eto came late, so she’s been assigned that role,” Korone explained.

(Hey, why are there voices coming from that book?) “Look at the book. We’re inside. Your job will be to read the text and lead us to the end of the story,” Korone explained. Fujiko had heard about Keina earlier, so she understood quickly what was going on.

(If only I’d gotten here sooner, I could’ve lived happily ever after with Akuto!) “Even if you’d made it inside, the most you could’ve been was the heroine’s mean older sister. Give up and focus on advancing the plot.” Korone was cold as ice.

(You’re just a maid, though!)

“Oh, the noble has relations with the maid, as well. Heheheheh.” Her cold “heheheh” was strangely intimidating.

This was getting beyond what Akuto could handle.

“L-Let’s not do this...”

“There’s no other way to get out of here. We need to complete the story.”

(Aah! I won’t let you be the only one to have fun with Akuto!) “It’s not your decision to make. The hero ends up sleeping with all the characters in the book, after all.”

“Y-You’re joking, right?” Akuto said, flustered, but Korone didn’t answer.

“Now, it’s time for the opening. The noble Akuto Sai is about to meet Keina Doronz!”

Korone snapped her fingers and pointed towards empty air.

Act 1

“Meet...? I already met her.”

Akuto was in the bedroom, not sure what to do. Korone said she wasn't in this scene, so she'd left the room. Akuto wasn't even sure what he was doing here.

(The protagonist was drinking all night at the count's party, and went into the wrong room!) Fujiko said in an irritated voice.

"I see... Then I just need to act drunk, huh? Um... I am so drunk!"

(Can you do a little better job of acting?) "I can't! It's not like I'm a real actor..." Akuto sighed, just in time for Keina to leap up awake in her bed.

"Who's there? What are you doing in my bedroom! Kyah! How rude! Get out! I'll scream!"

Keina had already read the book, so her acting was perfect. No, maybe she didn't even realize she was acting.

Her acting was so good, though, that Akuto forgot for a moment that he was acting, too.

"I'm sorry! I didn't mean to scare you. It's just that... you were so beautiful that I forgot myself."

(Akuto... You're not acting, right? So how are you copying the hero's lines exactly?) "...Is that true?" Akuto felt a little disgusted with himself. But the story moved on before he could think about it more.

"Your words are frivolous...! You're not a good man, are you?!" Keina quickly crossed her arms to conceal her exposed chest.

"I might be a frivolous man, but the words I said were real. I'll be leaving, then. The dawn's not quite here yet. Goodnight, once again." Akuto quickly left the room.

And then he looked up to the ceiling, at no spot in particular. Worried, he asked, "Fujiko, was that okay?"

(...It's perfect. Are you sure you didn't read the book in advance?) "Y-Yes, I'm sure..." As he stammered, he heard a voice from behind him in the hallway.

"B-B-B-Brother..." It was a very nervous voice.

He turned around in surprise and couldn't believe what he saw. It was Junko,

wearing a beautiful dress.

“Brother?”

He was surprised to see her out of her usual outfit, and he also had trouble looking at her. The chest area of her dress left little to the imagination, and the corset was pushing her breasts up from below.

“Y-You dummy! What are you looking at?” Junko looked like she was about to punch Akuto but Fujiko stopped her.

(Stop! You two are brother and sister! Hattori, I told you this, right?) “B-But Fujiko... I’m not used to dressing like this, and it’s really indecent...”

(I don’t care! If it bothers you that much, then let me do it! I’d look great in that dress!) Fujiko yelled.

“N-Now now, Fujiko. Just calm down... Let’s keep going,” Akuto said hesitantly, but that only made Fujiko madder.

(Leave the scene, arm around her shoulder like she’s your lover!) “L-Lover? We’re siblings, right?”

(Don’t ask me! I guess you’re siblings in a relationship with one another!) “Wh-What an indecent story...” Akuto responded.

Junko’s face went red, and her body shook, but she leaned up against Akuto’s shoulder.

“W-Wait, Hattori...”

“Call me Junko. I’m your little sister.”

“No, um... Junko...” he stammered, but Junko only pressed her body harder against him.

“L-Let’s go. This is what the story says, so we have to do it... We don’t have a choice...” She was giving excuses, but her face looked satisfied.

(Aaah! You came up with a way to enjoy it and still keep your dignity!) “The reader is being really obnoxious. P-Put your arm around my shoulder... Brother.”

“Y-You’re not going to hit me, right?” Akuto put his hand on her shoulder. He

only realized after he'd done so that her dress was shoulderless, and that he was touching her bare skin.

"Oh... I'm sorry."

"Y-You dummy! Why are you apologizing?" she said as she put her own hand up to his.

(I-I want to be inside, too...)

"S-Shut up, narrator..." Junko motioned Akuto forward, and they began to walk.

Then the door opened and Keina's head peeked out.

"H-He has a lover, I see. Not that it has anything to do with me," Keina said, doing a great job of playing a girl whose heart was wavering.

(Okay! The scene's over! Get off each other!) Fujiko's voice echoed loudly throughout the room.

Act 2

(The two reunite by chance. Um... Akuto witnesses Keina's father, the count, engaging in unscrupulous deeds, and is now on the run from his men. While he's running, he hides under Keina's... he hides under her skirt?!) Fujiko screamed.

"N-No, I can't do that... What kind of literature is this, anyway?" Akuto asked.

(No, Akuto... It frustrates me to say it, but many great works of literature include scenes where the hero hides under the girl's skirt...) "I-I see..."

(But that doesn't make it okay to... wait, the scene's already started!) Fujiko yelled.

Three men with swords were running at Akuto.

"Uwah!" Akuto quickly ran away.

But since he knew where he was going, and he didn't want to go there, he felt like he had to complain.

“C-Can’t I just blow them away with magic...?”

“No. It would go against the rules, and you can’t use magic here anyway,” said Korone, who appeared in the scene as a passing maid.

“You came out of nowhere... Hmm, I guess because it’s set in a mansion, you can have maids anywhere, huh?”

Akuto was impressed, but that didn’t make things any better. He kept fleeing until he reached Keina’s room. She was wearing a dress.

“Uwah!”

“Kyah!”

“Be quiet. I’m being chased. Um... do you think you’d be willing to hide me in the most natural manner possible?”

Akuto tried to change the script to avoid going inside her skirt, but he was helpless in the face of Keina’s desire to complete the story.

“Th-There’s no place to hide in this room... No, there is one place!” Keina blushed as she raised up the skirt of her petticoat. Her voluptuous legs were exposed all the way to her underwear.

“Uwah!” Akuto look away. But Keina continued to hold up the hem of her skirt, and he could hear the footsteps of the pursuers getting closer.

“W-Wait... What do I do?” Akuto couldn’t move at all.

And then...

Bam!

A passing maid suddenly slammed into him from behind. He rolled forward into Keina’s skirt. There was a rustling sound as she dropped the hem, and Akuto’s body was covered completely beneath it.

“Mistress, did you see an intruder?”

“He went that way.”

And then he heard the footsteps going away.

“Whew.”

It was too dark to see anything, but Akuto, who had been closing his eyes tightly, relaxed and tried to come out from under the skirt. But then something soft squeezed him tightly around the torso. He knew instantly that it was Keina's thighs. He could feel her heat throughout his whole body.

"H-Hey...!" Akuto jerked his body.

"No! Come out from there!" Keina yelled.

"Come out? I'm trying..." Before he could finish his sentence, though, he felt a fist whack him hard from the other side of the skirt. He understood what it meant, so he coughed and said his lines.

"Um. Uh... Excuse me. Well... I'm actually a little nervous. Are they really gone? Or are you trying to trick me?"

"Oh my. Not only are you a coward, but you're rude. You're doubting the courage I showed when I lifted up my skirt!" After saying her lines dramatically, Keina relaxed her thighs and lifted up her skirt again.

Akuto stood up. He didn't feel like he could look Keina in the eye. But she grabbed his cheeks with both hands and turned his face towards hers.

"This is the second time you've been rude to me," she said, angrily, and then she stuck out her tongue mischievously.

—I see. So she doesn't think she's part of the story. She knows it's a play.

Akuto realized this now.

Keina looked to be having a great time, like she was enjoying the story from the bottom of her heart.

"I'll apologize for my rudeness as many times as it takes. You are both beautiful and brave," Akuto said dramatically, and then winked at her.

Keina smiled happily, but her tone was still angry.

"Does that mean you intend to keep looking at me naked? Oh cowardly and dusty one?"

Keina and Akuto laughed at each other.

(Aah! Hey you two, this is supposed to be a story!) "I am just a passing maid,

but I think, as the eldest here, it's your job to let them have their fun. Now, on to Act 3!"

Act 3

(Um, the two of them continue to have a small infatuation for one another, but Akuto begins sexual relationships with girls he has no love for. Hey, wait! This thing's full of sex scenes!) Fujiko yelled.

"I'm just a passing maid, but I'm attacked from behind while replacing the flowers in this vase," Korone said, putting her both her hands on the vase and sticking out her hips. "Now come!"

"Not happening..." This time, at least, Akuto was hesitant.

"But if you don't make me yours, the story won't progress." Korone shook her hips enticingly.

"Please stop doing that when you've got no expression on your face..."

"The book doesn't describe the maid's expression."

"Well, probably not, but... Hey, Fujiko! What exactly does it say, specifically?" Akuto got a look on his face that indicated he'd come up with a good idea.

(Details... A-Are you going to make me read it? Ahem... "He jumped her from behind like a beast, and fulfilled his lusts violently.") "If that's what it says, then... Akuto jumped her forcefully from behind, and...

"Aah! Stop, please stop!"

"This is what you get! This is what you get!"

"Oh, please stop! Stop spanking... stop spanking me..." Korone said, sounding quite bored.

Akuto was spanking her with a feather duster.

"Is that fulfilling your lusts violently?" Korone asked. Akuto nodded.

"Well, sure. Sometimes I get mad when you try to make my life difficult."

"...Oh, it hurts. Master, please stop. It's my first time."

(Oh I see, you found a loophole. Let's see... The next scene involves his little sister...) "I-I have a very bad feeling. What's wrong?"

("They both go to bed naked and rub each other's bodies. Akuto sticks a finger in her peach-colored blossom and finds it dripping with dew, and then it welcomes him inside. Junko moans forcefully..." W-Wait, what are you making me say?!) "We're sure this is literature, right?"

"It started off as a cheap romance novel!"

"W-Wait! This is my next scene?!"

Junko was bright red and ready to punch Akuto.

(I-If it were me I would've taken him to bed long ago! You're just too shy! Hahaha!) Fujiko sounded very calm, considering she'd been blushing when she was reading herself.

"No, we'll think of a way around it." Akuto began to think.

"Y-You don't need to think about it too hard. Except for that part about 'welcoming you in,' I'm willing to... go pretty far. If you just want to touch it..." Junko was mumbling to herself and looking at the floor, but Akuto wasn't listening.

"I know. Maybe this will work."

"W-We have to get in the same bed naked... don't we?"

They went to an empty room, and Junko got into bed, pulled the covers over her and took off her clothes. Her heavy negligee slipped to the floor by the bedside.

Akuto turned around and answered her.

"That's right. We can't help that part, but I'll make sure not to touch you... I'm getting in too."

Once he saw that she was ready, Akuto got in on the opposite side of the bed.

"Y-Your foot touched me a little. And you didn't see me when you lifted up the covers, right?"

"I-It's okay. But you were turning away from me, so all I saw was your back. I

think I've seen that quite a lot already..."

"You dummy! Keep your mouth shut!" Junko yelled.

"I-I'm sorry." Akuto apologized and took off his clothes under the covers.

The bed was big, but not so big that he could avoid touching her back when he stripped. His hand ended up lightly going straight down her back.

"Pyah!" Junko gasped and jerked away. And then she bent over and began to shake.

"Oh, sorry. Did that tickle?" Akuto reached out his hand to apologize, without thinking about what he was doing. His hand ended up lightly rubbing her waist.

"Hyaaaah!" She began to twist back and forth.

"I-I'm sorry. That tickles, doesn't it?"

"N-No, that's not it... Just don't move..." Junko said as she gasped for breath.

"Oh, um... S-Sorry." Akuto apologized, not sure what was going on.

A moment later, Junko spoke in a trembling voice.

"O-Okay, let's do this..."

"R-Right..."

The two of them gulped.

Akuto reached out towards Junko. She closed her eyes tightly and turned her face towards him.

And...

"Aah... This is so pathetic... This is all we're doing, but... actually, because this is all we're doing, I feel like I've lost something important as a woman..."

"Yeah, I'm feeling weirdly pathetic too..."

Both of them popped their heads out of the covers and put their hands into each other's hair, where they played with the rose blossoms and petals they'd placed there.

"We were lucky there was a flower metaphor there..."

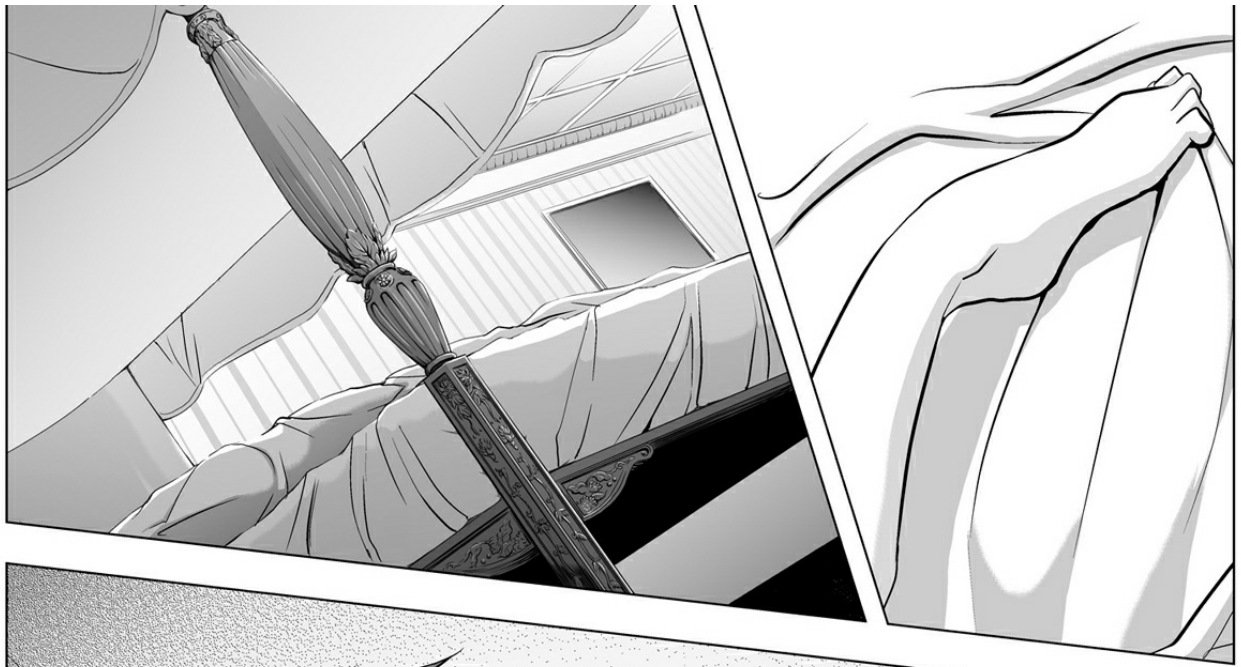
“Did you get the petals nice and wet?”

“I guess...” Akuto pinched the rose blossom with his finger and stuck a finger in between the petals.

“It still feels kind of indecent somehow...” Junko sighed as she watched Akuto’s fingers at work.

“Let’s finish this up quickly. I’m going to stick my finger in your ear, so moan. Moan.” Akuto stuck his pinky finger in Junko’s ear.

“Hyaah...! S-Stop that... It’s actually more humiliating than actually doing it... aaaah...” It was a moan of shame more than pleasure, but it was still a moan.



The door to the bedroom opened.

“Akuto, as promised, I... Wh-What are you doing...! Bwahahaha! Ahahahahah!” Keina barged into the room, and then burst out laughing.

“Oh, you’re not supposed to laugh here...” Akuto said, and Keina stopped herself from laughing.

“Y-You’re right... H-How could you, Akuto! That’s so dirty...!”

“W-Wait, Keina! She’s...”

“No, you know how I felt about you and you went and did this anyway! I’m going to tell my father!” Keina ran off.

“Wait...” Akuto leaned up and stretched a hand towards the door. When he did, he took the covers with him, exposing Junko’s body to the outside air.

“Y-You dummy! The covers...!”

“Oh! Um, sorry...” As he put the covers back over her, his hand touched her waist.

“Pyaaaah!”

(Gah! I’m so jealous! If Akuto’s willing to touch your body so freely, then next time he’ll definitely be willing to do the same to me...) “And thus was born a machine that will endlessly fondle the erogenous zones on your back,” Korone said, interrupting.

“Now, put this towel over you and get dressed. It’s time for the next scene.”

(After this, there’s a scene where Akuto isn’t sure which woman to pick.) “Um... between the little sister, the maid, and the countess’s daughter?” Akuto asked as he put on his clothes.

(That’s right. But he quickly gives up on the maid, and as he talks to her, he learns that he’s not actually related to his sister. That’s how the story goes.)

“Alright, anyone who isn’t a noble, get out of the room. It’s time for Act 4!”

Once again, Korone pointed to empty air.

Act 4

“The two of you aren’t actually related. Your sister was adopted from a house of bankrupt nobles when she was very young,” Korone said, very awkwardly.

“That’s why we were drawn to each other, then? Then that means I have to choose between the two of them!” Akuto said, a little too dramatically.

Akuto wasn’t an actor by any means, but this line felt especially heavy to him. Because...

“Do I have to choose someone here?” he whispered to Korone.

“What does that mean? Do you want to keep all of them for your harem? We can redo the scenes again, if you like. Or do you not want to choose anyone? If not, the story won’t advance.”

“That’s what I mean. I don’t want the story to go any further,” Akuto said.

Korone shook her head.

“You have to choose, Master. That’s what it means to take responsibility when dealing with a woman.”

That line was clearly from the book, but Akuto shook his head.

“I know I need to be responsible. But even if I choose my sister, won’t the story still end?”

“That means changing the story and giving it a different ending, right?”

“That’s right. But the virtual phase space will still close, won’t it?”

Korone shook her head.

“That will likely mean that Keina Doronz will remain unsatisfied.”

“But if she’s satisfied, she’ll disappear, right?”

“Correct. She is a warp, so that’s what is natural for her,” Korone said coldly.

“She’s human,” Akuto said, a little upset. But Korone’s response was instant.

“If she was a Liradan, it wouldn’t be a problem if she disappeared...”

“Don’t say that. I would be upset if you disappeared, too.”

“If you really think so, then you should have made love to me instead of giving me a spanking...” Normally Korone’s jokes were effective, but not today.

“That’s not what I meant. I think it’s okay if the space closes without her being satisfied.”

“Even if that were possible, if you think that’s what’s best for her, you’re wrong.”

“What...?”

“Even without entering the phase space, she would have disappeared shortly after this. And in that case, the one thing she wishes for wouldn’t happen.”

“But...”

“When it comes down to it, this is all you can do. Tell you love her, even if it’s just part of a story. The others will, just this once, permit you.”

“Why do I need their permission... But I guess that’s my only choice, huh? Fine. I choose her. I choose Keina Doronz,” Akuto declared with a nod.

○

And then came the last scene, filled with battle and romance.

Keina was imprisoned in a tower while her father, the count, went on to do further evil deeds. But Akuto cornered the count with beautiful swordplay, and defeated him.

Akuto did what was right, but he was pained by the fact that he had to kill the count. To make matters worse, the count’s men hid the evidence of his crimes, and tried to kill Akuto so that they could take over his lands.

Just when it seemed like Akuto was about to be killed... Keina realized her love for him and saved the day.

“Akuto! Shove your blade into that crack in the rock! It will bring down the tower!”

“But Keina, if I do that, you’ll...!”

“I don’t mind, as long as you survive!” Keina said. She had made her choice.

Akuto jammed his sword into the rock.

With a rumble, the tower fell — and Keina was caught inside.

But Akuto ran up the crumbling tower to grab her, and then leapt into the air.

“Akuto!”

“Keina!”

Her face shone with happiness in the morning sun. The two of them were standing alone on the cliff where the tower had fallen. They gazed into each other’s eyes, and there was nobody to stop them now.

“Ahahaha! Ahahaha...! That was fun. It was so much fun,” Keina laughed.

“I had fun, too. I didn’t used to like cliché stories like this, but I think maybe I should change my mind,” Akuto said, panting from exhaustion.

“I... I only cared about you,” Keina said in a serious voice.

—*Yeah, that’s right. Every story has an ending.*

He didn’t know if Keina’s words were from the story or what she was feeling herself.

“Me too... inside this story... Maybe it’s rude to say it that way, but...” Before he could say another word, Keina put a finger to his lips to quiet him.

“I know you’re rude already,” she said.

“Yeah... I guess so. I...” He tried to say something else, but she shook her head.

“It’s okay. I was only born to help you, and I’m going to disappear in your arms. That’s my fate. Right?”

“That’s not...”

“No. I know what’s going on here. I’m the only person here who’s part of a story. I was different from all of you from the beginning. We were only together for a short time, but you gave me everything I wanted.”

“No, I didn’t do anything! I barely spent any time with you at all! We didn’t get any time to know each other...”

“No, you gave me everything. You finished the story. That’s all that matters.”

“But why do you have to disappear?”

“A real person can’t exist within a story. But I was allowed to do that. That’s the difference. I’m not going to disappear, I’m going to live happily ever after, for eternity. Because you gave me that happiness.”

“But I don’t want that. It’s my fault. I wished that the Law of Identity would give me freedom...”

“A story is a short dream. You’re not allowed to live inside a novel.”

“But I’m also... I know...”

“Don’t be sad. Once the story reaches the last line, we live happily ever after.” Keina wrapped her arms around Akuto’s neck.

Their lips drew closer. But Akuto couldn’t bring himself to feel her soft lips upon his. Instead, hot tears touched his cheek. He didn’t know if they were his or hers.

And then there was no one in his arms.

—*Ah... aaah...*

Akuto turned around and saw Korone and Junko.

“She’s gone,” he said.



The next thing he knew, he was on the floor of the old library.

—Hmm? ...Huh? What just happened?

Akuto sat up. Junko was on his right, and Korone was on his left. Fujiko was behind him. All of them were unconscious.

—Oh, right. We were assigned to clean this place up, when the books fell over...

And Keena was in his arms. She was on top of him, looking down at him with sleepy, innocent eyes.

“Morning, Ackie.”

“Good morning... wait, what happened?” Akuto patted Keena on the head, as he tried to remember what was bothering him so much.

“Nothing at all,” Keena said. She was staring at Akuto with round eyes.

“Hmm... If you say so. Hey, I was wondering... why is it you sometimes look so cruel to me?” Akuto said.

Keena blinked as if to reply that she had no idea.

“Cruel? That’s not true. But Ackie, you can only cheat on me once, okay?” she said, and then grabbed him and held him tight.

“Cheat on you? What are you talking about? I didn’t cheat on you. We’re not even dating...”

He fell backwards when she grabbed him, and the noise woke the others up.

“Ugh... I feel like I was having a horrible nightmare. Wait, what are you two doing?!”

“Aah! I came to check on you because I was worried, and you’re with that girl again, Akuto!”

“What sort of person could be capable of causing a Liradan to go unconscious?”

“Oh, everybody’s awake! Hey, look everybody! The books all fell down!

Crash!”

Keena, oblivious as ever, spread out her arms wide.

○

For a while after that, Akuto had a strange nagging feeling that something was wrong, a thought he couldn't get out of his brain.

Eventually it went away, but he found he'd developed a new habit. He'd started to take an interest in physical books, and read a few stories. And each time he flipped the pages of a book, for some reason he felt a tightness in his chest.

It was worst of all with books that had happy endings.

“What am I trying to read?” he whispered to no one in particular, and the wind blew the pages as if answering his question.

4 - An Afternoon With Dolls

The girl was in a room surrounded by non-functioning Liradans; in other words, dolls.

She was still only around 10 years old, but there was something in the room that was very strange for a girl of her age to have: dozens of mana screens. They were the only thing in the room besides the dolls. There was nothing else there at all.

“The only thing I feel after I finish a work of literature is empty,” she said, speaking into the mana screen.

There was a doll on the screen. From the shape of the room and the other men visible on the screen, she seemed to be participating in a meeting.

And the mana screen next to it was clearly showing what the doll saw.

This was the true identity of the person codenamed 2V. She’d belonged to the cabinet’s magical intelligence office, the organization that worked for Boichiro, and now she was controlling it. She was an expert spy and strategist capable of controlling dozens of dolls at a time. Even CMID-8, the office’s most high-ranking experts, had never seen her real face.

“This isn’t a book club. What does that have to do with this meeting?” one of the meeting participants said.

“Oh, I’m sorry. Don’t get so upset. It has plenty to do with it. I just witnessed a revolutionary use of virtual phase space.”

2V brought another screen close to her. It showed footage of the old library on the grounds of Constant Magical Academy. Several of the students there were dolls.

“Virtual phase space? That’s a defensive mechanism built into the gods’ devices. It’s the space we pass through when we’re teleporting...”

“Virtual phase space is essentially empty, though you’re free to bring

whatever you like from the outside. So unless you're trying to use it as part of a defense system, it's an inefficient way to kill people, or lure them in to start a war." 2V spoke with far more complex words than a girl her age should have been able to use. No, maybe she wasn't that age at all.

"And?"

"It seems it's possible for the Demon King's wavelength... no, the wavelength generated by the resonance between the Demon King and the Law of Identity, to have an effect on virtual phase space. Ahem. This means that if you can get a hold of the Law of Identity, we can bring things like images, stories, and similar concepts into virtual phase space."

"I'm afraid that's too complex for me to understand..."

"Well, we'll go over the detailed theory later. Essentially, you can go inside a game, or a movie. Something like that."

"And that's why you mentioned literature...? No, but we're talking about our plan..."

"Haha! I thought I made it very simple to understand. We can make a playing field where we decide the rules! And when the Demon King gets inside... he'll be human."

2V's words, or more precisely, her doll's words, caused chaos in the meeting room.

"I see...! So then we can kill him..."

"Then we won't have to fear that the next god will die, too!"

"And the streets will be safe again. Now we can stop the demon worshipers from growing any more powerful."

"That's right. I'd like your permission to come up with a plan."

2V promised to submit a plan within a week, and her doll left the room.

"Now then... It won't be easy to kidnap the Law of Identity, but I can go myself if I have to. Those cells of Akuto Sai that Rubbers brought back will probably be quite handy."

2V rolled up the sleeves of her plain white shirt, crossed her grey slack-clad legs, and turned to look at the mana screen.

Afterword

Thank you once again, everyone. It's me, Shoutarou Mizuki.

This is volume #6. It's kind of a breather from the main story. But if you consider this book a comedy, this is the real story, and when I started, this kind of thing was all I wrote.

But breather or not, the theme of the story feels oddly important. Sometimes this happens when you just write whatever comes to mind, and so I'm reminded of the importance of not taking things too seriously when you work. Did I just say I write whatever ideas come into my head? Well, I'm not supposed to say that.

Oh, also, even though it's volume 6, you're free to read it as a stand-alone story. For those of you who picked up this volume without reading the others, for whatever reason, give it a go.

Now let me go over some other new developments.

Beatnix Inc. will release the drama CD on February 25th, 2009. There may be a second one, so please give it a listen.

Also, the first volume of Itou's manga is now on sale from Akita Shoten. In some bookstores, it might be right next to this book. Please buy them both.

And now, thanks.

Souichi Itou, my illustrator. There were a lot of scenes in this that reflected my own personal interests, and I was happy to see them illustrated in a form that went beyond what I'd imagined. Also, congratulations on your move. I'll be paying you a visit soon.

Ohashi, my editor. I think I'm getting a reputation for being consistently late, but I'll try my best to get faster. I look forward to working with you on the next volume.

Also, thank you to everybody who worked on the drama CD. I really

appreciate it.

Next up is volume 7, where the story will take a new turn. There's still a lot more fun to come!



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Demon King Daimaou: Volume 6

by Shoutarou Mizuki

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